

SUNRISE OVER INDIA

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by

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TO MY COUSINS
AUDREY AND DAVID BENNETT

This book is dedicated

*O Sadhu ! my land is a sorrowless land.
I cry aloud to all, to the king and the
beggar, the emperor and the fakir—
Whosoever seeks for shelter in the
Highest, let all come and settle in
my land !
Let the weary come, and lay his
burdens here !*

*So live here, my brother, that you may
cross with ease to that other shore.
It is a land without earth or sky,
without moon or stars ;
For only the radiance of Truth shines
in my Lord's Durbar.*

—*Kabir*, translated by
RABINDRANATH TAGORE,

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THE BEGINNING OF IT

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IN ENGLAND, when you meet a new acquaintance for the first time in a drawing-room, or under the quiet shade of a cedar-tree, a remark is made about the weather. It is the correct conventional overture, and as you murmur, "Don't you think it has been cold to-day?" you do not stay for an answer, but hurry on to more important themes, conscious that you have done your duty. In India, when you meet anyone for the first time, you are asked, "Have you read *Mother India*?" Moreover, whether it be in Bombay, Delhi, or Peshawar, in the States or in the Provinces, the questioner does not hurry on to other themes. Unlike Pilate, he does await his answer.

This book is in no sense propaganda. It is neither defence nor accusation, it is rather a confession of defeat. Not entirely a question of I went, I saw, and was conquered, for, primarily, it is the story of one moment. That moment was a matter between me and India, and, if I communicate it to others, it is less for their sake than for the hope of reliving that moment myself. A vain hope, no doubt, for can one ever succeed in transmitting a subjective experience as one may recount a bald statement of fact—such as, "I saw the sun rise over the Jamna"? —I am afraid not. A sharp corner is turned, and you may never be the same again to yourself. The world will no doubt say: "The first flush has gone. Well, it can't last for ever." The spirit which is not born cannot die, and the end of that moment was, no doubt, long before I ever saw the light. But as far as I myself was concerned its beginnings were simple and obvious.

During a heat-wave in August, I sat in a Camberley drawing-room. The garden outside was full of pine-trees, and

resounded to the drone of insects. The drawing-room was quiet and shaded, and on the walls hung water-colour sketches of Kashmir. I sat, half drugged with warmth, listening to a voice that told, in everyday tones, stories of the endurance and courage of people in India in the old days ; tales of children born in the wilds, with only a bearer in attendance ; of women lying in rooms whose walls crawled with rats. Tales of how the long journey up into the hill-stations was made by tongas that lurched round corners, whose horses stumbled on the uneven roads, while the women sat, all through the weary hours of the day, with their babies clutched in one arm, while with the other they held the bigger children by their sashes, pushing them back against the slippery seats as the horses clattered downhill. As the quiet voice went on to talk of crowded bazaars and teeming cities, the air seemed to fill with clamour. I saw turbaned figures, bright colours, brilliant saris, and smelt musk and hot dust. Momentarily, a Brahmin bull, garlanded with lotus flowers, shook his horns in that conventional Surrey room. Only at the end did the voice rise a little in excitement : " All those years, the separations, the losses, not a moment of them was wasted." Then it was that my imagination took fire.

It was a wild November night in the Mersey. The air was dank with moisture, and the decks gleamed where the rain had made pools by the rails and under the lifeboats. The passage to India had begun, and, as I looked down at the sodden waters of the Mersey, I felt as if I were going to hell, and that I was going there not merrily at all. The worst moments of life are when you know that you have only yourself to blame. I might have been in London. I had a vision of a wet autumn night, and the traffic going up Piccadilly, of people pushing into theatres or into restaurants. I saw myself, in a white fur coat, standing in the *foyer* of a theatre in Shaftesbury Avenue, while a man in uniform fumbled with the tickets and said : " Stalls on the left—downstairs on the left, please." Or I might have been in

Oxfordshire. Suddenly I felt the weight of a terrier's body slumped against my arm, and I saw a room—fire-lit, with books.

Of all the countries in the world, to have chosen India ! It had been my deliberate choice : that was the sobering reflection. How easily and quickly one can make one's own fate, less by design than by one of those disastrously violent decisions that seem to lift destiny by the scruff of his neck and shake him into a different mould ; as if one could, by the strength of one's grip, seize on the harmless necessary cat and turn him into a snarling panther. Or so it seemed to me that night.

There were on board that ship two horses, shipped from Marseille to Bombay—racehorses, from a French stud, about to be turned over to an Indian owner. They had come on board with some written instructions as to diet, and they were handed over to a kindly, if ignorant, sailor, who laboured with them on the lower after deck. One of the horses was conscientious and seasick ; the other rolled his eyes, and chewed the wooden bar that kept him in his box until his mouth was a mass of sores. No one quite knew what to do about them, and there were dark rumours that they would not reach their destination without disaster. We were all willing but helpless, and the sailor in charge sweated with responsibility.

Sometimes I used to go and stand by the rails of the upper-deck, looking at his efforts below in the well deck. A fellow-feeling drew me to him, for I also was driving a team of horses, though, had I confided this to the sailor, he would have had me chained up until we reached the nearest port. Of all the delusions of the sea, the most inconvenient would be to imagine oneself a charioteer. Nevertheless, my two horses were, in one sense, as real as the two on the after deck. And though, by the awkwardness of my driving, both might be maimed, and many feathers lost in the crush, I was not afraid that they would either strike, trample, or try to outrush each other. Nor was I willing to admit that the

white horse alone was of good breed. The black horse—though a friend to riot and insolence, and shaggy about the ears—was positive that he could follow the immortals and have a sight of real existences. It was perhaps that latter paltry conceit that made my task the harder. I was the charioteer of both, and therefore responsible. It would have been easy enough to have driven one singly, for the white horse loved honour with temperance and modesty, and my only fear where he was concerned was that, like the horse on the after deck, he would develop colic. Equally, had I had the black alone, it would have mattered little to anyone if we had run to and fro, I at his heels, looking frenziedly for beauty.

The white horse was outside myself, connected with me by the bonds of friendship alone. The black horse was inside my own soul. He it is who has stood often between me and success. Just as I have been about to grasp the golden apple, he has rolled an eye, kicked out, and away we have gone up some desert track, leaving the apple to rot in the sunshine. It was he whose blood took fire that August day in the Camberley drawing-room, and now, having got his way, it was he who was gnawing his wooden bar in a frenzy, hating everything and everybody, including the prospect of India.

What had India to offer to the likes of him? It was a vast sub-continent peopled by races including the dark Dravidian, the volatile Hindu, the long-haired Sikh, and the sturdy Muslim. These peoples, varying from the gay black-faced Madrasi to the fair-skinned, blue eyed Pathan of the North-West, were presumably ruled over by lean, stern-faced Britons wearing topis, who, in their turn, were doubtless under the thumb of the memsahibs in the bungalows. This much the black horse knew. He also knew that he was supposed to be interested only in the topi-wearing Britons. The boat had taught him that. At home, in England, people had accepted the fact that it was conceivable to go to India without a topi and yet to be in search of something

beside an orgy of Government house parties. But, somehow, on the boat that idea died. By the sound of it, India was full of Europeans. Flowers bloom best in their native soil, and, if I had wanted to spend the winter among Europeans, I should have stayed in Europe. I had thought that I wanted to find India, but, on board ship, I discovered that there was no India to find ; there were only club houses and amateur theatricals, and it was a dismal thought. It was this thought that drove the black horse to chewing his bar, and reading Shakespeare and dreaming of Stratford when he should have been studying the history of Akbar.

No one undertakes to cross the ocean wantonly and for no particular reason. It is an expensive and a tedious experience. In fact, it speaks much for the endurance of mankind that there are not more shipboard suicides. You traffic with the sea usually in search of something. It may be gold or love or excitement. The author of *Mother India* went in search of Hindu religious symbols. The black horse had no interest in symbols, Hindu or otherwise. But having fancied that he was going to look for a lotus-decked Brahmin bull, and having found that the flowers had withered and the bull shrunk to the proportions of a skinny, ill-fed cow, there seemed little or no reason for going to India at all. Coming events did not cast their shadows before them. Tossing on a sea covered with rearing white horses, watching the seasick despair of the racehorse on the lower after deck, and trying to curb the rebellion of the dark beast within my own spirit, I had no precognition of what India had in store for me.

If I seem to harp on that moment, it is because it is the only justification for this book. I have no business to write at all. I don't know anything about India. I seem to see the indignant looks of those who, armed with the angelic forces of knowledge, forbear to tread the path that I, poor fool, am rushing down to my doom.

There are two sides to every question. It is only a god who dares to forgive all because he knows all. And if I seem to

have ranged myself on one side rather than another, and in so doing have failed to steer a middle course, it is because I write in gratitude of a country and peoples to whom I owe one of those absolute hours which are the only compensation for the fret and anguish of modern existence.

PART I
FRONTIER MAIL

CHAPTER I

APOLLO BUNDAR

FROM OUT OF the confusion of my first evening on Indian soil two impressions stand out sharply ; I was garlanded with tuberoses, and I tried to kill a man.

The confusion began the moment the ship came alongside. There had been an hour of loveliness before we docked, when Bombay, wrapped in mist like a woman half veiled in a gauzy sari, had revealed the faint gracious lines of her coast. Through the heat haze, Malabar Point was visible to the left, then the reclaimed land by Back Bay, the town dominated by the hotel which dwarfed the surprisingly insignificant Apollo Bundar, and behind all, the ridge of hills whose hill tops were lost in the mist. The moment the gangways were lowered, the agents poured on board with letters ; the Parsi money-changers with their shining black hats, and countless husbands and fathers all seemed to charge upon an already crowded ship. The heat was damp and sticky, and Ballard Pier was as ugly as Liverpool docks.

The noise and turmoil increased with every moment. Passengers and their friends were jostled to and fro. A young woman, with bare legs and sandals that exposed her painted toe-nails, had her foot kicked, and expressed a forceful opinion upon other people's carelessness. She suggested Paris-Plage, and I had understood that the mental attitude to be arrived at in India was one of kid gloves and high neckbands—Bath or Tunbridge Wells. A dignified middle-aged Parsi, wearing a black shining linoleum hat, gave me change. I wanted to ask him if he really worshipped the fire, but his bland arrogance was between me and all

frivolity. Meekly I took the change he gave me, not daring to count it.

Some well-meaning friend had told us that you paid one rupee for each piece of baggage that was carried on shore by a coolie, but that what you took yourself went free. We took the implied advice, and our leaving of the ship was an undignified and fatiguing affair. Exhausted, we sank, like refugees, on to a bench in the custom-hall. The scene was almost as distracting as the one we had left. There was nothing to be done but to leave it in spirit if not in fact. I opened my letters, and immediately I was in England. Time passed. I looked up and found that the customs was almost deserted. A sense of desolation clutched me. Had we been left behind? We were strangers in a strange, and, to judge from the customs, an unfriendly land.

"We must find the agents," I said, trying to summon an authority that the heat and noise had dissipated.

One agent, four coolies, Clare, and I were struggling with a broken lock when a fellow passenger told me that I was wanted by a man outside.

"Why doesn't he come in?" I asked breathlessly.

"He's a bearer. Servants aren't allowed inside the customs."

A bearer—that meant someone to help; someone who would carry all those unnecessary packages that would go in none of the boxes. I was ignorant then, but time taught me that a bearer would carry nothing more invidious than a camera.

I went outside. A man, tall and angular, was peering anxiously across the threshold. He wore a grey silk puggari, a shabby tweed coat, and baggy white cotton pyjama-trousers. Some six inches of striped shirt hung out under his coat. He handed me a letter, that bore my name written in my cousin's handwriting. As I took it, I wondered why he hadn't tucked in his shirt. His face was badly pock-marked, and there was something wrong with one of his eyes. It was not, I hoped, anything catchingly wrong, and

I sighed, thinking of another bearer I had known who was neither pock-marked, diseased, nor dirty ; and then I remembered that he had travelled from Peshawar to meet me, and probably he at that moment was criticising my appearance with more excuse, since I had merely stepped off a boat whose companion-way was visible through the open doorway across the hall.

Abandoning our possessions to the agent's care, we stepped into a luxurious open taxi. I felt mentally bruised and stupefied. If only the drive might continue for ever ; if only one were left in peace to shut one's eyes. Then suddenly the smell of the East smote my nostrils : that strange blend of musk and dust, incense and garlic, spice and dung, which, once smelt, is never forgotten. I opened my eyes.

A beige-coloured ox, with a hump on his back, went by, drawing a cart. On the pavement, a bright blue crow danced and fluttered. But oxen in Europe didn't have humps, and no self-respecting crow was blue. This was India.

The streets that lay between Ballard Pier and the hotel were tawdry and theatrical, more like an exhibition than a sea-front town. Men wearing only a white dhoti, their legs like polished mahogany, walked behind women clad in coloured saris ; naked children rolled on the pavements, and dogs snuffed in the gutters ; while over all the dusty sun-baked air danced with golden heat.

They received us blandly at the hotel, and we were put in the charge of a large, benevolent commissionaire who spoke admirable English. I enquired if we might have a dressing-room, until the evening, where we could leave our packages. The commissionaire replied that it was quite unnecessary. Our packages could lie safely against the wall at the foot of the staircase. No one would touch them. They were arranged, a row of miniature refugees' bundles, against the wall at the foot of the broad marble staircase. Two crushed tweed coats were laid across them.

My glance was dark with disfavour. The commissionaire, however, did not agree that they lowered the tone of the

hotel. He assured me that the floor was clean, while I reassured him that it was neither the floor nor the risk of theft that I feared—no one is tempted to pilfer the backwash of other people's trunks—but the look of the thing. I imagined a similar scene enacted in the chaste halls of the Ritz Hotel, London. But, apparently, in India one did not have to vex the soul over trifles.

Having lost the point to the bland commissioner, we rolled away, in another open taxi, to the stores. There we bought everything that anyone had assured us was necessary for two days and two nights in the train. The purchases included a basin with a canvas cover, an implement for slaughtering flies, a bottle of methylated spirit, and, remembering the quality of the meals served on English trains, enough tinned food to provision a party to the North Pole. At each department we were joined by a small boy, who carried the parcels. Presently we had amassed quite a retinue. At the last department I found an English salesman, and asked him what was customary. He looked at the row of grinning white-clad little boys, whose coloured puggaris were like the nodding heads of peonies, and smiled.

"It's left entirely to the judgment and generosity of customers," he said.

In the end it turned out to be quite an expensive pastime.

Returning in the taxi, I looked ruefully at the roll of notes in my bag, which had been a solid thick wad when we left the ship. The value of the rupee had then, and has to this day, no meaning for me. There are thirteen to the pound, and there are sixteen annas to each rupee. But that has never conveyed anything tangible to my mind. I only knew that I had given £20 to the gentleman in the linoleum hat whose god was the fire, and that in return I had received a thick parcel of notes. Already a large portion of the parcel had gone, and all that there was to show for it was a basin and some tins of biscuits. At this rate I should soon have to return to England. The thought at that moment was consoling.

On the first floor of the hotel a band played. The lounge was spacious and cool. In the shadows of the ceiling, far above our heads, fans stirred the air. There were basket-chairs and small glass-topped tables, and the windows were open to a lawn bordered with shrubs. The buildings beyond the hotel garden took on fantastic shapes as the dusk deepened and the evening light lent grace to the blue-and-white stucco.

The first meal on shore is memorable. The weeks of rough seas and bad food were suddenly as if they had never been. Fellow-passengers sat beside us. A few tables away from us, a fair-haired woman was sitting with an Indian, who wore a grey puggari and a long plum-coloured coat. The Indian had quiet manners and the eyes of a prince. An acquaintance came up and spoke to them.

The fair-haired woman said : " I am sorry we can't wait. His Highness and I are going to a cinema."

They rose and walked slowly across the lounge and down the marble stairs. The band played a waltz, and the air seemed suddenly warm and friendly with the familiarity of everyday things. This surely could not be such a barren land after all, where colonels' wives went to cinemas with Indian princes, and bands played Viennese waltzes the while one ate *éclairs* and watched the sky turn from blue to indigo.

Presently we went and sat out in the verandah overlooking the harbour. It was dark, and the moon had risen and the stars were out. Below in the quiet waters of the harbour there were Indian sloops with lighted companion-ways. In the moonlight the Apollo Bundar looked grave—dignified; and beyond the docks the night seemed to deepen and to become one with the hills. On the pavement below the verandah, women walked slowly with their husbands. They had the grace and poise of spring tulips in their saris of crimson, scarlet, orange, flame, or mauve.

Long fine glasses that tinkled with floating ice were brought, and we turned our chairs to watch the people

coming up the marble stairs. It was like a procession in a pageant, except that pageants are always intolerably dull, whereas it was exciting to watch the princes and the millionaires, followed by their servants or their wives. I noticed, sadly, that none of the servants had their shirts hanging out, neither had they diseased eyes nor pock-marked cheeks.

After dinner it was time to return to Ballard Pier. The bearer was standing at the foot of the stairs. To the heap of our packages he had added one varnished tin trunk and a bedding roll done up in a blue-and-white dhurrie.

The drive back to Ballard Pier was through deserted streets. The population of Bombay had retreated into their own homes. Lighted doorways and uncurtained windows gave us quick elusive glimpses of interiors.

The station was almost empty, and the custom-house echoed hollowly to the sound of our footsteps. The train seemed oddly short and unimposing ; but after Delhi, they told us, it would be coupled on to the G.I.P. railway. A few coolies and nondescript-looking Indians squatted against the rails at the back of the platform. The train bore the inscription : " Frontier Mail," and little shivers of excitement caught us as we read the words and thought of the distance that the train had to travel before Peshawar was reached.

The agent gave us our tickets, and I paid him in return a small fortune for excess luggage, harbour dues, and service. Being made reckless by the air of Bombay, I failed to notice that the service was already included. However, we parted the best of friends.

Returning from a walk down the platform, we found that the bedding rolls had been unpacked, and that the bearer had successfully converted the coupé into a sleeping-apartment. Meanwhile a group of well-to-do Indians had gathered near the door. At a signal from our bearer, they came forward. An elderly man, presumably the father, led the way, carrying three garlands of tuberose ornamented with greenery and pink roses. He was followed by two young

men, bearing each a stiff round Victorian posy in a paper holder, with a white paper Toby frill to keep the flowers in place.

The bearer advanced, took a garland, turned very solemnly, and hung it round my neck. He did likewise by Clare ; then, bending his head, the elderly man hung the remaining garland round his neck. The young men stepped forward with their bouquets, which were first given to the bearer and then handed on to us.

It was a charming ceremony, gracefully performed, and I only hope that our surprise and the native *gaucherie* of our race did not make our reception too clumsy. It is a high honour to garland anyone, and we were duly sensible of the favour, and paraded up and down the platform with our garlands and our bouquets, to the amusement of the rest of the train.

Apart from the pride in receiving a garland on the first night on Indian soil, was the uneasy feeling that, however catching the bearer's eye might be, however inefficient his service, he was with us for the duration of our visit. After having given me such a moment of drama, and so beautifully welcomed the stranger to his country, I could never have the heart to send him away. I turned to scrutinise his friends or relations—not that I entirely believe that a man shall be judged by his intimates. They were respectable in the extreme, and had an air of property that the bearer lacked. One of the young men was distinctly handsome, and had enhanced his beauty by sticking a crimson rose above one ear.

Having watched the bearer embrace his friends in a most touching manner, and after reminding him to call us in the morning, we climbed into the carriage and shut the door. A notice warned us that anyone climbing on to the steps outside the door of the train whilst it was moving would be severely punished. Another notice told us to lock the door at night, and bolt the shutters at the windows. I had finished reading the notices to Clare when the train gave signs of

starting. We bolted the door and drew up the shutters, and were about to sink complacently into our seats—the words : “What more could you want?” were forming themselves on my lips—when there was an imperious knocking on the shutter of the window near me. The train was already in motion, and imagining that the bearer, having failed to reach the servants’ compartment in time, was seeking asylum with us, I let down the shutter with a bang. Immediately a head and shoulders were thrust into the coupé. A boy in a blue coat and cap that might have been an official’s was standing on the steps in front of our door. “Memsahib,” he shouted above the noise of the train, “you haven’t paid enough on your luggage. You have to pay me forty-five rupees.”

I replied : “Get out.”

Instead, he pushed further through the window. In a second he would have climbed in. There was only one thing to be done. It was impossible for him to travel on the steps ; it was even more impossible to admit him into a coupé, with no communication with the compartments on either side. I gave him one more chance, and repeated : “Get out.”

“Forty-five rupees,” he began again. “Memsahib——”

I seemed to have no choice. I put both hands on his shoulders, and pushed him backwards. The noise of the train hid his fall, and the darkness swallowed him up. I had the uneasy satisfaction of knowing that at least he could not have fallen under the train.

We bolted all the windows, and undressed. In the bath-room I put the feet of the bouquets in a basin of water, and hung the garlands over the towel-rail, that the bearer might not think us neglectful. Also the smell of the tuberose in the coupé through the night would have been overpowering.

When the lights were out, the darkness was like black velvet against my eyes. After nearly four weeks in a cabin where the lights from the alley-way shone in through grills

above the bunks, this impenetrable sable was appalling. I tried to visualise India against the ebony background, and to fill the coupé with coloured pictures of saris and beige oxen. Strange country of contrasts, bearing garlands, welcoming with poetry, and, the next moment, trying to rob. The thought of the boy in the blue cap worried me.

"Clare—that boy—do you think he's much hurt?"

"Well, no; not much hurt."

"You would have done the same?"

"Of course. These trains, they don't go as fast as the English ones. Besides, you haven't killed him."

"No." My voice in the dark sounded dubious.

The thought that persisted was that, even if I had known he must be killed, could I be certain that I should not even so have pushed? Was I already, after six hours, willing to admit that there might be occasions when to kill a man with one's own bare hands was not only necessary but excusable?

The night of dark and rattle seemed interminable. The train climbed continuously as she crossed the Ghats, and the air that blew in through the shutters was dry and cold. I lay licking the dust off my teeth, and listening to the clattering of the train and the sudden bursts of sound that broke on us each time there was a halt at a station. Judging from the noise, one might have imagined that there was a riot on each platform, and that a frenzied mob was about to storm the train. Added to the passionately excited cries of Indian voices was the shriek of night-birds, and the weird piercing sound of the crickets. Gradually, as the night wore on towards the morning, I began to recognise words in the confused babel. Over and over again came: "*Gurram pani*." and then, "Musulman." The word between was lost. I knew that *gurram pani* meant hot water. Why should Musulmans need more hot water during the night than Hindus? From further down the train another cry was taken up: "*Gurram duhd*." That meant hot milk. Perhaps the Hindus got the hot milk and the Muslims the water. The train took

up the cries after the station was passed. *Gurram pani* for Mussulmans, *gurram pani—duhd* for Hindus, for Hindus, for Hindus—— I slept.

We woke at Ratlam, to find ourselves travelling over a flat beige plateau with scattered low bushes and acacia-trees. The line ran past strange huddled villages of mud huts and wayside shrines. Processions of women in skirts of terra-cotta or burnt sienna, with tinkling silver anklets, walked along sandy roads, carrying pots or bundles on their heads. They walked superbly, with a melting grace that was like music. There were herds of goats that looked more like spaniels than any self-respecting goats ; pie dogs yapped and played, and naked children stood gravely at attention to watch the train go by. Towards noon the train skirted a belt of low hills covered with a strange purple bush of the indigo family. In the ravine between the hills there was an oasis of trees and a shimmer of pale water, and grey monkeys, with long tails, leapt and whirled together. The train crossed many bridges where, far below, the dry, stony beds held now mere trickling streams of water that in the rains would become roaring torrents.

Time ran on with a rapidity that was amazing. I wanted to press out and arrest the essence of the moments, savouring each to the full, before reluctantly I let it slip behind me. There was much to be done : a continual washing and tidying in the small marble bathroom next door ; the coupé to be dusted. The carriage was new, and we took a pride in keeping it immaculate. Already it had a home-like air, with books on the shelf and biscuit-tins, and cushions on the lower bunk. A chintz bag, containing coats, hung on a peg. We had heard much of the dirt of Indian train-journeys, and it was a matter of self-esteem to keep ourselves, and our surroundings, in a state that approached that of ordinary life. For two days we battled against the odds of dust and flies. Upon each subsequent journey in India the tension slackened until the last—across the Sind Desert, at the beginning of the hot weather—was an abandonment to prevailing conditions

wherein I took thought neither for the compartment nor for my own appearance.

In the late afternoon the train reached Kotah junction, where, in a siding, there stood the private train of the Maharajah, gleaming with white paint, brass rails, and polished trellis-work. At the next station the first of our friends left us, and disappeared into the warm, scented evening. The day had ended with that abruptness that was a reminder, apart from anything else, that this was Asia. As night drew on the air grew colder, and in the dining-car everyone was dressed in tweed. There was a sense of bustle and unrest, and hurried good-byes were exchanged. After Delhi our party would be a small one.

The train screamed into Delhi Central. After the peace of the new station, where she had waited for ten minutes, the turmoil was overpowering. Leaving the bearer in charge of the coupé, we sauntered on the platform, and watched the long G.I.P. train coupled to the short B.B.C.I. The carriages of the G.I.P. were crowded to overflowing. It looked as if the whole population of central India was moving northwards. Even our own exclusively empty train had now hardly a vacant seat.

Families squatted on the platform, oblivious to the surging crowds round them. They were encamped for the night, awaiting a southbound train that was due in at 6 a.m., undaunted by the prospect of eight hours on a stone platform.

Suddenly, with a snort, the Frontier Mail began to steam out of the station. I had the start, and reached the coupé first. Hot on my heels, Clare, as she was about to jump on the step, was caught round the waist by a small, wiry station-master. In the tussle that ensued, Clare showed the advantage of the girl's-public-school training. With a final kick she sent him reeling backwards, and threw herself head-first into the coupé. The bearer, meanwhile, stood silently in the background. In those first days his silence was a constant irritation.

We sat on the lower bunk, breathing hard, spent but

victorious. And, as we mopped our faces, the Frontier Mail slowed down, went into reverse, and glided gracefully back alongside the opposite platform. The station-master had by now picked himself up. He came up to the coupé door, grinning with a kindly contempt.

"Why couldn't you have said, 'shunting'?" Clare asked, with pardonable annoyance. We none of us like to be made to look ridiculous, and the station-master, in spite of his fall, had had the best of it. I awaited the moment of Clare's arrest for assault, but the station-master merely laughed good-naturedly and walked away leaving us to reflect upon a country wherein it was possible, with impunity, to knock down station officials and to attempt to kill boys in blue caps.

My thoughts were interrupted by the untimely appearance of a particularly revolting dwarf, who mopped and mowed in front of the window, and whined in the traditional sing-song of the beggar. As he paid no attention to my peremptory "*Gao*," finally we were obliged to pull up the shutters.

In order to travel in India it is only necessary to know three words of Hindustani—*gao*, *ao*, *lao* (go, come, and bring). The most important of these is *gao*—go. It has been stated that that one word alone will carry a man safely through the sub-continent.

We awoke, at Amritsar, to a different world. The plains, flat, cultivated, with casuarina-trees, were on either side, as far as eye could see. Two hours later, the train reached Lahore—another large, noisy station. The crowds surged in front of the windows, gazing in upon us in a manner that, as strangers, we resented. Further south, the women in red skirts and the men in the vermilion puggaris had taken no notice of us. But these northerners stared in with a surly interest that was not wholly to our liking. A woman in a blue serge frock and a white topi came and said: "Let me see your tickets, please." She wore no badge of the official, and I disliked her Anglo-Indian voice. Reluctantly I opened

my bag, and held up the tickets well out of her reach. Perhaps she merely wanted to satisfy herself that we were not travelling on second-class tickets, or she may have thought that my eye had a dangerous glint. In any case, with a nod, she left us. Later, we learned to be less suspicious of these female inspectors, as every large station produced them, and sometimes they proved to be intelligent and pleasant-mannered.

The plains stretched from Lahore to Jhelum, fertile, no doubt, in spring, but now it was always the same beige world, mile after mile : beige fields, beige villages made of hard-baked mud. As the train went northwards the crowds at the stations increased ; the men were taller, stronger, and wilder-looking. There were Muslims everywhere, and the women wore trousers. The lovely coloured puggaris gave place to grey or duck's-egg blue ; the dhoti of the Hindu was replaced by the pyjama-legs of the Muslim.

Abruptly, after Jhelum, the country changed. The plains were left behind ; civilisation disappeared. Where were we ? Out of the world altogether, into Mars or the mountains of the moon ? It was a beige world still, but no longer the warm, kind world that had been familiar since birth. Not a single human being, not an animal, not a tree, was visible. It was a wild world of sandstone, thrown and tossed up into fantastic shapes of castle, crag, or twisting down into a serpent-like ravine. What immortal mind had had the audacity to frame this astonishing symmetry ?

Then, in a moment it seemed, the sandstone fantasy was gone, and we were crossing a plain bordered with rose-coloured hills. At four o'clock the train steamed into Rawal Pindi station. After the turmoil that had become our hourly portion, Rawal Pindi, with its clean, quiet station, empty of noise and crowd, had a smug air that was almost suburban.

Beyond Rawal Pindi the country had a desert quality, as if we had reached the top and the end of the world. There were uplands with flat tops like tables, as if their summits had been carved off, and, in the distance, on either side were

the still lovely rose-coloured hills. The sun set magnificently in a sky of green and pale mauve. At the last station, where the daylight still lingered, a mountain rose out of the ground behind the station-master's house, and a procession of men, wearing yellow puggaris, walked serenely, carrying banners into the sunset.

Then night was upon us. We only knew that we were crossing the Indus by the lights on the bridge, and a pale gleam of water far below the train. At Nowshera our last friend left. As we scuttled down a long dark platform to the dining-car, the thought came, heady, like wine : this is the North-West Frontier at last.

The four remaining Europeans in the train sat down to a nine-course dinner. "The next stop is Peshawar?" I asked the waiter, a Mohammedan with a crimson-dyed beard.

"Peshawar City is the next stop. Cantonments after that."

We ate, slowly, as many of the nine courses as we could encompass. We tried to spin the meal out, making it last as long as possible. The twenty-seven miles from Nowshera took over an hour by train. The last nut had been eaten, and the bill paid, before we reached Peshawar City.

I was hearing a voice say, in a London drawing-room, six months before I left England : "If the situation doesn't change, if I had my way no woman should cross the Indus." The situation had changed, and already we were on the Frontier. The same voice, however, had said, on the eve of my departure : "In Peshawar, you must learn to laugh at murder."

When I spoke of roaming at will in the city, I was told that on no account could I attempt to leave the cantonments without an escort. We were four Europeans in a train containing hundreds of Indians. The latter would leave the train at Peshawar City, forbidden ground, apparently, to us without an escort. What did we do? I leaned across the table. "If those two men leave the dining-car, we'll go too."

Naturally the men did leave the dining-car. I paused for a

moment on the last step of the carriage before I hurried to the front of the train. In the dim light the station was crowded with tall, white-clad figures carrying rifles. The station police were armed—otherwise the Pathan's station had an air as innocent and ordinary as the Harrow Road on a Saturday night.

There was time only to count our packages, and to see that nothing was left behind, before the train came to its last halt. Our journey was over.

The air was cold and sharp. After the noise of the train, the empty station loomed enormous, like a deserted garden. It was hard to believe that we were on the Frontier.

The car turned out of the station yard and up a road bordered with high trees. In the darkness, beyond the range of the headlights, a boy's voice sang in strange, high, nasal tones, and far away there came a weird cry as of a baby in distress. A dog barked in a compound near by, drowning both the song and the call of the jackal.

Presently I found myself in a spacious white room, with a rafted ceiling as high as a church. There was new matting on the floor ; a fire burned brightly under a white stucco mantelpiece, on which there stood a blue pottery bowl filled with crimson roses. I loved that room at sight. The journey was over ; for better for worse, the passage was ended, and I was in India at last.

CHAPTER II

PESHAWAR

TH**ERE ARE PLACES WHICH**, having no remarkable associations or outstanding claims to fame or beauty, yet fire the imagination of men, and in consequence suffer overmuch from legend. With his lavish tendency to emphasis once he had explored, man sets a heavy seal upon certain regions, hallmarking them without much thought of their mints ; overlaying the original structure with a flimsy creation of his fancy. Thus the good and the bad features are exaggerated until they are distorted into absurd proportions. Such has been the fate of Peshawar.

It has been called the city of a thousand-and-one sins, the Paris of the Pathans, and a town where more murders are committed in one day than in all Chicago in a week. Putting aside these sonorous phrases that delight the journalist's ear, Peshawar has inspired in the hearts of the Pathans, and of a few Britons, a love that passes the love of woman. From the Pathan point of view that is not, of course, saying very much. The cult of woman is not practised on the Frontier where woman, as such, plays a very small part in the life either of the country or of its men. A woman is either a man's mother, or the mother of his children, and in these two capacities commands respect. In a land where a rifle is reputed to have more value than a wife, romance can hardly be expected to attach to the female element. The Mohammedan, who has hitherto kept his wife and daughter in the closest purdah, and has only recently begun to admit the need of education, finds little to excite his imagination in a creature, good and simple though she may be, who has but two thoughts in her head : food and babies.

The Pathan of the Frontier bears a close resemblance to the Highlander of Scotland. His inborn mania for fighting makes him quarrelsome and hot-tempered, quick to take offence and to find insult where no insult was intended. Both have warm hearts, and are capable of much affection ; both have a passionate sense of hospitality to the stranger, and a loyalty to his own cause that amounts to fanaticism. It has been said, " With all the low cunning of the hill tribe," and therefore I forbear to boast that my own people are without that capacity for cruel treachery that has stained the Frontier with a thousand dark crimes. That stubborn pride, which, when turned to good account, makes for such a splendid stoicism and courage, is at the root of that insidious passion that works secretly in the Pathan blood. For all the passions that breed vice in Peshawar, and, putting legend aside, they are many, whether they be of the flesh or of the soul, the most dangerous and the commonest is that which leads to the *badla*—the revenge or blood feud that is practised to this day on the Frontier.

" We Pathans never miss a revenge," I was told in jest. Yet, even as I laughed, I knew that below the laughter there was cold fact. The turning of the other cheek, and the forgiveness of an enemy, makes no appeal to a people who worship the law of the Prophet who taught the old code of an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, and who are pleased to call themselves the Unconquered Jews of the World.

In spite of their overweening pride and sententious attitude to violence, they are a humorous people, and their punishments, though crude sometimes, are made to fit the crime. There is a supposition that it is customary for the erring wife who is caught *in flagrante delicto* to have her nose cut off. Whether our proverb, " To cut off the nose to spite the face," owes its origin to any such custom, I know not. In any case, if you are in a merry mood and meet a veiled Pathan woman, having first ascertained that her husband is nowhere about, you say :

" I see you have had your nose cut off ! "

" It's no such thing ! " she cries, flinging back her veil in outraged indignation.

Whereat you laugh loudly, since no woman is permitted to unveil before a man who is neither husband, father, nor brother.

Another side to their pride is their inordinate vanity. The Pathan looks at his reflection, and sees that he is tall and stalwart, with broad shoulders and aquiline features ; that he has a fair skin, and eyes, whether they be blue or brown, that have a hard, vigilant expression. Being human, the sight that his mirror gives back to him—if he possesses one—is of intense satisfaction. As he slings his gun over his shoulder, and hitches up his long, full, white trousers, he feels that there is no one in the world worthy to be counted beside a Pathan. This attitude is, of course, extremely irritating to the rest of the world. And if, secretly, I sympathised with it, it was because there ran in my head a certain toast of my own people : " Here's tae us. Wha's like us ? Damn' few, and they are aw' deed."

But if the mental attitude of the Pathan resembles the Highlander's, and if the state of the Frontier is strangely similar to that of Scotland three or four hundred years ago, no one can pretend that the granite streets of Aberdeen, or the windy corners of Edinburgh, in the smallest degree recall Peshawar City with its Street of the Story-tellers and its Serai of the Dancing Boys.

The approach to the city from the cantonments is along the Mall, with grass borders and tall pepal-trees, past the gardens of Government House, along a dusty road to the bridge where the barbed-wire entanglement that surrounds the cantonments ends appropriately beside the Central Prison. Across the bridge, the road leads to the city gates. Bullock-carts, donkeys, herds of goats, pic dogs, tongas carrying purdah women covered from head to foot in the burqa, a white garment with a small square of netting closely woven, through which they breathe and see, jostle each other

on the dusty road. Thence, through a high gateway, you enter the city.

Imagine a narrow street of open shop-fronts, copper-workers, dentists, food-shops, clothes-shops, brass-work, and pottery. No shop has need of window or door. The open fronts are built above the level of the street, in hard-baked mud houses held together by wooden frames. The flat roofs of the houses are screened round by walls or mat screens, protecting them from their neighbour's curiosity. Here, through the long burning summer, as dusk falls and the brutal sun sinks below the mountains, families gather to eat their evening meal and cool themselves before the slow, hot torture of the night begins. Every house is full to bursting-point, and the over-crowding that breeds disease and vice is rampant, and apparently incurable, since every extension of the city means so much more frontage to guard against attack. Many thousand people of every race, creed, and colour are herded into an area of amazing smallness. Is it surprising that sickness and crime flourish in the dust, and that there is more villainy per head of population than in any other city in India ?

The streets are thronged with Muslims, Hindus, Persians, Afridis, Afghans : an astonishing mingling of race. Everywhere there are children swarming, playing, begging. In every street there are beggars ; some with the terrible apathy of semi-starvation ; some mere bundles of dirt and rags, lying in the road ; others making the most of their diseased and twisted limbs. An ugly side of the picture that, and shocking to eyes fresh from England. Then the other side—sheer loveliness, to compensate one. A creature of the deer family stood, proud and graceful, tethered to a post outside a shop that sold grain—great bowls of grain that were every colour from palest yellow to a deep brown and dark green. A figure with a long beard bent over a flickering charcoal fire, stirring something in a pot that was hung by a long handle. A young Joseph walked by, with a coat of many colours. Esau, very wild and hairy, passed with a goat-skin

over his back. A narrow alley ran uphill from the main street, and a herd of goats surged and pushed between the mud huts, driven gaily along by a little singing boy with an ivory skin and dark-blue eyes. It is in another dimension of time, back in the days of the old Testament. Across the threshold of the pottery-shop lay a beggar covered with dirt and sores. Beyond his recumbent figure, a narrow alley-way led to another, at right angles, even dirtier than the first. Across a filthy entrance, a rickety staircase led up to the secrets of the house. Beyond the staircase, a doorway opened to a square building like a barn. There were shelves round the walls, and rough tables in the centre, covered with Peshawar pottery, crude blue or green or yellow. In a corner, on a square of matting, a man kneaded and beat the damp clay, turning it and shaping it with his hands. The air was cold and dank as a tomb, and, having chosen a grim beggar's bowl for flowers, the endless bargaining began that is indispensable to Eastern life.

Outside in the street the pressing crowds round the car were a reminder that it was not Bond Street but Peshawar City. But the eager faces were lit with interest, not hostility, and there were friendly policemen to send them away if they came too near. Through the street of the fish and fruit-sellers, by way of the street where they sell painted legs for charpoys and gold tinsel tassels, was the Ghor Kattri.

From the top of the famous gateway there is a magnificent view not only of the city but of the plain on either side.

Peshawar stands in a valley surrounded by a horseshoe of mountains. It is a city half as old as time ; a city that has been besieged and fought over and destroyed and captured and recaptured, and may be a hundred times again in the future. The streets and lanes of the city are mere sword-thrusts cut in its sun-baked walls, and, from the dusty road, a man looks up and sees only the shadow of his neighbours' gun, warning him to be on the alert. From the broad roads of the cantonments you raise your head and see the proud

snow-capped top of a mountain rearing its head against a glittering blue sky. Or, from the flat roofs of the city, you see, on all sides beyond the plain, the dragon-teeth hills of the Frontier.

Beyond the mountains, the mainland of Asia begins. The harsh, bleak ranges press close upon the fertile plain, vigilant warders of the sleek, rich lands of Hindustan. The bare, bloody hills are the cockpit of the sub-continent. From time immemorial the men of the north have marched that way : the Scythian, the Tartar, the Arab, and the Moghul. Moscow decreed that the road to London was through India, and that the road to India was through the Khyber Pass. There is nothing in history that has stirred the imagination of man more than a dramatic death. Is it, then, strange that Peshawar City, where dramatic death is as common as the blue mina-bird, has that strange power to bewitch the hearts of men ?

To return within the barbed-wire is to pass into another world. To live in the cantonments is like making one's home in Kew Gardens. The grass in the gardens is kept watered and close-cropped like an English lawn. Everywhere there are trees : banyans, pepals, tamarisks. The compounds are full of flowers, masses of roses, African marigolds, chrysanthemums, and Morning Glory. Along the Mall there are bushes of purple bougainvillæa and scarlet poinsettias. As spring advanced, from a garden near the race-course came bunches of dog-violets to remind one of England. The bungalows in the shady compounds were large and comfortable. Fresh fruit and vegetables came daily from the nursery gardens near the large Mohammedan mosque on the Shabkadr Road.

Inside the barbed wire, a road encircled the cantonments—the North Circular Road. Along the broad empty road, bullock- and buffalo-carts ambled slowly, or trains of camels on their way to the passes beyond the Khajuri Plain, and donkeys laden with packs of wood brought down from the hills by trans-bordermen. Beyond the barbed wire, the

plain, menacing and beckoning, stretched to the foot of the mountains.

Behind Government House, near the museum, was the parting of the ways. The road to the right led safely home down a straight clean boulevard, where, if I were lucky, I might meet a man with a performing bear, or two *malis* fighting with a pair of shears over a question relating to the cutting of a hedge. But if I were unlucky, and this was usually the case, I met only a few acquaintances, with whom I exchanged a remark about the weather. Exactly, in fact, what might be found on a walk through Kew Gardens.

The road to the left led over the bridge towards—well, not, perhaps, the Celestial City, and some might have called it the City of Destruction. But over there, amongst the dirt and squalor, there was teeming life. There was a possibility of danger and delight at every street-corner : a knife in the back, or an enforced trip on foot across the jagged teeth of the mountains into the no man's land beyond. Anything was possible in a city where crime was more usual than a morning bath. One day the Khan showed me the bungalow that he had bought in the cantonments. It was of red brick and solid, standing in a good-sized compound. The Khan gazed through the gate with eyes of pride and longing. "We are moving from the city as soon as I can get possession. I cannot have my family living any longer in the city."

"You really think you will be happier in the cantonments?" I asked.

He looked surprised. "But, of course. The city is dirty, noisy, overcrowded. It is unhealthy."

"Here you will be shut in behind the barbed wire."

"Why should I mind the barbed wire? The city is guarded."

"That's different. All cities are shut-in places. You expect nothing else. But here it's intolerable."

"You should be grateful to the barbed wire. Without it, you wouldn't sleep safely in your bed at night."

"It is not so much the barbed wire. It's what it stands for."

"I do not understand."

No one understood. It was not that I believed with Rousseau that free-born man was everywhere in chains. Moreover, I did not believe that man was born free. But to be shut within the barbed wire, when, within walking or tonga distance, the city full of secrets beckoned me, or, beyond the dusty plain, those sandstone hills invited one to explore their passes, was an intolerable thought. The trouble was that other people were content with the club and the golf-course. It was their endeavour to rebuild, as far as lay within their power, the green and pleasant land of England within the cantonments. They wanted to forget that they were living in India, and to pretend that it was Somerset or Surrey.

If I murmured that I wanted to walk in the Street of the Story-tellers, they said: "You will get smallpox." And once, when a lawless fit was on me, I announced: "I am going to visit the Serai of the Dancing Boys," I was received with such a look of horror that I never dared allow the magic words to pass my lips again. I took to the Sada Bazaar as I suppose a man in desperation will take to sailing a child's yacht on the Round Pond. The Sada Bazaar was squalid and dirty. It ran parallel to the Mall, and a short cut at the back of the compound brought me out near the General Post Office. It smelt of drains—the gutters served as such—dust and garbage, and the air was full of the germs of all the diseases that were rampant in Peshawar. I admitted all this, but, being a town-dweller by instinct, I preferred it to the chaste monotony of the Cantonments Gardens.

There was a chemist's shop near the gardens, kept by a young man who wore a brown lounge suit and spoke correct English. It was our habit to go there for tooth-powder and

cold cream, until one day I found another chemist in the Sada Bazaar where the owner wore his shirt hanging over his white cotton pyjama-legs. He also sold cold cream, but the atmosphere of his shop, unlike the empty respectability of his rival's, was gay. He talked freely, if ungrammatically, and made trenchant comments on his customers' purchases. When I bought castor oil, he laughed loudly, and implied that if I had curbed my appetite I should not have had to buy the oil. This was brutally true, and I bore him no malice. At New Year he gave discount to his customers. As he handed me my parcel, he gave me a bill. "You keep that, Miss Sahib, and then at New Year you bring in all your chits, and I give backsheesh—two annas in every rupee."

I thanked him, and stuffed parcel and bill into my Kashmiri bag. I was late that day for lunch, and, before I hastened to the dining-room, I handed the bag to the bearer. He, in a fit of virtue, took out the parcels and arranged them neatly on a table, putting the bill, carefully smoothed and open, face upwards on my dressing-table.

That afternoon I had a caller. When she rose to go, she sauntered over to my dressing-table, to see that her hat was at the right angle. We had been talking about India. Suddenly she burst out : "I hate the Indians. You can't get away from it : they are beastly."

She said good-bye, and hurried away before I had time to ask her to qualify her statement. I walked over to the dressing-table. As I bent to open one of the drawers, I saw, staring up at me from the white-embroidered cover, the astonishing words : "You lack virility."

Feeling somewhat surprised, I looked again, and saw that the words printed in large letters were a heading to the chemist's bill. Under this gratuitous statement, in letters even larger, was printed : "You need Nectarine Pearls," and in smaller type : "Doctor Recomends." At one side of the paper there was a small picture of a sickly youth in earnest consultation with a bearded physician, and, opposite,

another picture, of a nurse smiling by the bedside of a feeble-looking young lady. The name of the chemist appeared in small type underneath, and at the foot, in pencil, my purchase : "1 bottle hazeline : Rs. 1. As. 8."

I picked up the bill, and carried it over to the door. Through the open verandah doors I saw the sun-flooded compound. Between me and a tall dusty pepal-tree there was a hedge, and at the other side of the hedge a sand enclosure had been made, with low mud walls. In this enclosure three figures knelt at prayer.

"Praise be to God, the Lord of all creatures ; the most merciful, the King of the Day of Judgment. Thee do we worship ; and of Thee do we beg assistance. Direct us in the right way of those to whom Thou hast been gracious ; not of those against whom Thou art incensed, nor of those who go astray."

I looked from the kneeling figures to the recommendation, spelled with one *m*, of Nectarine Pearls.

The roots of the lotus-flower are grown in manure. Everywhere there was the same ludicrous contradiction ; philosophy and black superstition ; divinity and dirt ; beauty and squalor ; gentleness and cruelty. Unless one could make up one's Western mind to accept it all, to bring oneself, like George Sand, to admire the spotless white rose growing out of a hedge whose lower branches had been touched with ordure, one would never get anything into focus, and it would be better to give the whole subject up and go home by the next boat.

I was still standing in my doorway, holding the chemist's bill, when my cousin came round the corner of the next house skirting the praying figures.

"What are you thinking about ?" she asked.

I pushed the bill between the leaves of a note book, lest it should offend the eyes of any future caller, and turned to the fire.

"I am thinking," I answered slowly, "of what a friend who has lived in Spain said to me. I asked her if she liked

the Spaniards, and she replied : “ No, I don’t like Spaniards, but I go in constant danger of loving them.”

“ Is that what you feel about India ? ”

“ No, not yet. But I hope I may ; and I’ll let you know when I do.”

CHAPTER III

FARMAN SHAH

TO HIS INFERIORS, and they included not only the sweepers but the postman, who held him in profound respect, he was known as "Shahje Sahib."

My cousin was one day sitting in my verandah, while I dressed in the inner room to go out. The postman put his head round the glass doors, and handed her a letter.

"For Shahje Sahib," he said, and disappeared.

"Who," asked my cousin loftily, "is Shahje Sahib?"

I advanced through the curtained doorway, and laid the letter carefully on the writing-table.

"It's for Farman Shah. He's just gone down the Sada Bazaar. He'll be back directly."

"I have lived in India for the greater part of my life, and I have never yet had a servant who was called Sahib by the postman or anyone else."

"All the sweepers and the under-servants call him that. I didn't know the postman did."

My cousin looked at me grudgingly. "It's a very odd thing that you always seem to acquire the kind of servant to suit your temperament. Now I have to put up with dolts and fools, or just ordinary solid good workers without a grain of sense outside their own jobs. Your servants read books on history, are mad on sight-seeing, inspire homage from their fellows"—I began to preen myself, but mercilessly she continued—"make a ridiculous fuss about bad smells and dirty bathrooms, and otherwise do no work, are really bone-lazy and spend all their time playing cards and gossiping down an alley in the Sada Bazaar."

"And you," I burst in, self-defensively, "are the one who engages my servants as a rule!"

Shahje Sahib, or Shahje, as his friends called him, or Farman Shah, as I called him, had no beauty. His pock-marked cheek I soon learned to ignore, but his bad eye worried me, first because I feared that we might all wake up one morning and find ourselves in like condition, and afterwards because I learned that it was cataract neglected beyond all redemption.

Our relations at first were strained and difficult. The letter he handed to me at Ballard Pier opened ominously: "Here is your bearer. On no account be familiar with him. These northerners are rough men and do not understand chat or well-meaning kindness. They work best under direct orders, simply given."

The charge of familiarity was galling. If Farman Shah were a northerner, so was I, as proud as he, and it was hardly likely that I should stoop to have my kindness despised. On this uncompromising basis the journey up-country began, its first hours softened by the garlands and the bouquets. Yet even as the flowers wilted in the bathroom basin, so did my kindliness of manner. He brought us breakfast at Ratlam, and, with a smile that gave charm to his face, asked how long I was going to stay in Peshawar.

"I don't know," I replied shortly, and dug into a plate of rumble-tumble.

The smile died, and Farman Shah said no more. In fact, after that he never spoke unless strictly necessary, and then with as few mumbled words as possible. He frequently did not understand my English, and was too proud to say so. Orders were neglected or wrongly carried out. In those first weeks in Peshawar we hated each other. The cold was extreme at night and in the early morning. I went about huddled up in wraps. Farman Shah did the same. He wore a tweed coat that would have disgraced a tramp, and six inches of shirt, not always over-clean, hung below the coat. He was not the only man in Peshawar who followed this

untidy fashion. One day I was driven to remonstrate. "It is fashion of my race," he answered stubbornly, with an accusing look. It was the fashion of his race to have the shirt hanging down ; it was the fashion of mine to tuck it in. There was nothing more to be said.

I bore the coat and I bore the shirt meekly, but the muffler was a continual thorn in my flesh. He wore it wound round his neck when he brought the *chota hasri* to my bedside. As he put the tray down, the muffler slipped, almost touching my bread and butter. As he straightened himself, he twitched the ends of the muffler back over his shoulder. Every morning the same ritual was gone through. If it had been any other colour I should not have minded. But it was a peacock-blue, and of all the colours in the spectrum the one I most dislike, even more than old-gold, is peacock-blue. As I could not very well say to Farman Shah that I protested against the colour of his muffler, he continued to wear it and I to suffer in silence.

There was no open war, however, between us until Christmas Eve, the season of peace and love. Outside, in the cantonments, the British tried to fill the air with a hollow goodwill and merriment. Those, and Clare amongst them, who were not in bed with influenza had gone to the races. I lay in my white room, watching the pink glow of the fire on the distempered walls, imagining I saw instead the crowds of belated shoppers surging down the High Street Kensington, or the willows, red in the frosty air, standing guard round an Oxfordshire greystone church. Presently the glow died on the walls and the room grew ash-coloured.

I stilled my cough to call for Farman Shah—it being the custom of Indian bungalows to be without bell or knocker. No one came. I called until I could call no more. Then I lay and waited till the fire went out and the room became like a vault.

Punctually at half past four Farman Shah came, carrying a tea-tray. I waited until he had put the tray safely on the table. Then I looked from the fire to him, and I spoke. He

made no reply, but waited until I had finished, then turned on his stockinged heel and went in search of wood and coal.

"Surly brute," I thought, and put the thermometer under my tongue. Anger is a more deadly poison than influenza, and the mercury had risen a point.

By the time dinner came, the fire he had built up would have heated a cathedral. The walls blushed with reflected glory. I lay and listened placidly to the merry crackle of wood. When Clare returned from the dining-room she found that the matting in front of the fireplace was burning nicely. We both shouted. Farman Shah came running. The sweeper came, and brought a bucket of water, and tackled the situation with a calm and courage that won my admiration. Soon the danger was over, only the fire had again been put out and the matting was spoilt.

By this time rain was pouring down the wide chimney. A heavy shower had burst suddenly and ironically over Peshawar. Had it been timed for half an hour earlier, Farman Shah would not have been in disgrace for a second time, and the matting would have been saved.

At ten o'clock the third and worst disaster occurred. The *chokidar's* fire was by a tree just outside my verandah. He supplied hot water to the bearers after the kitchen was locked for the night. Farman Shah had been told to bring the hot water, by way of the bathroom, through Clare's room into mine—the three rooms communicated—a circuitous route, no doubt. He chose to-night, to take the short cut, leaving my door and the verandah doors wide open to the wet night air. Clare, coming into my room from her own, found the door open, and bolted it. "Perhaps that'll teach him," she said. It did, but hardly as she had meant that it should. Farman Shah, finding the door bolted, dashed through the verandah, with the hot water, and round the house and down the lane to the bathroom. He was in a hurry, in case the water cooled, and also because it was raining. In his haste, he did not look where he was

going, splashed into a puddle, slipped on the thick dust which the rain had turned to greasy mud, and fell backwards. His trousers were drenched; his coat was drenched. His puggari fell off, became unrolled, and lay in a morass of water. Miraculously, he saved the jug. The hot water was gone, but the jug was intact. It had been a better thing to let the jug go and to have saved his honour or his puggari—they were one and the same to him. Here was a pretty state of affairs. The other bearers had gone off duty. Hot water had been ordered. More of that could be got in a moment from the *chokidar*, but who was there to take it to the Miss Sahib? The puggari was a sodden mass of grey cotton and a ruined silver basket flattened by the wet. Impossible to put it round anyone's head, and to enter the Miss Sahib's room with an uncovered head—but, hush! it wasn't seemly even to contemplate that.

Presently there was a rustling by the curtains over the doorway into Clare's room. We looked up in astonishment. The curtains were parted a cranny to admit of one eye—the good eye—and half a cheek.

“What on earth's the matter?”

“I fell down,” a piteous voice murmured.

Clare went to see what had happened. Presently she came back, gurgling with laughter. “It's all right now, and he's bringing more hot water.”

He came, a dripping figure, and put the hot water on the table by my side, his face averted that I might not see the abject shame in his eye. Wound round his face and head, partially concealing his disgrace, was the peacock-blue muffler, stained with mud and rain. It had its uses, after all.

The next day—it was Christmas morning—he came and stood beside my bed. We were alone.

“Miss Sahib, I am sorry for yesterday.” He really said “to-day,” but “to-day” and “yesterday” are the same in his language, showing a beautiful disregard for anything as arbitrary as time, and I knew what he meant.

"What happened?" I asked hoarsely. "Why weren't you there in the afternoon when I called?"

He spread out his hands, and then twisted them nervously together. He had extraordinarily small hands, with fine wrists and fingers.

"My friend came. We went to my go-down."

"And then?"

"And then we went to walk—only as far as Sada Bazaar."

"I see." I did see. I understood that his friend had come, and that the impulse was irresistible to flaunt hand in hand, with linked fingers, beside one who wore a single rose above one ear. Friendship is the white light on the face of the waters in the early morning. It is the silver cord we hold to as we run to and fro in the jungle. Shakespeare understood it, and all the Renaissance people. It is found in the singing of youth; it is one with loyalty in middle-age; it sinks into gentleness when old age comes and there is only a shaft of moonlight between us and eternity. If as a generation we know little else, we do know that.

How could I deny to Farman Shah his silver cord?

I said: "It doesn't matter in the least. Only, the next time your friend comes and you want to walk, let me know first."

He looked at me for a moment. Then he went away on his silent stocking-soles. I saw that his heels had great clumsy darns in the socks. It was a pity his friend was not a woman.

As the weeks went on, the friend became part of our household. He was bearer to someone else—I never discovered whom—but in the end he helped Farman Shah with most of his work. In the early morning he was there to help us off to the station, and in the evening he was there again to meet us. Sometimes I discovered him making my bed, or filling a hot-water bottle. Whether I walked in the cantonments towards the road to Bara Fort, or towards the race-course, or past the museum, I was sure to meet him, either going or coming. His duties, or his pleasure, took him all over Peshawar. He salaamed me whenever we met.

"Who is your friend?" an ironical voice might ask.

“Not my friend, but Farman Shah’s.” This was my invariable reply, but my voice was touched with pride, and to this day I cannot be certain whether the pride was entirely that my bearer had such a personable friend. For the friend had beauty, and he took immense pride in his appearance, for, being a Pathan, he was extraordinarily vain. In winter he wore grey tweeds and a grey puggari; but later, when the hot weather was beginning, he wore a bottle-green full-skirted coat that entirely hid his shirt, and a pale green puggari with a silver basket in the centre. He was a bachelor and could afford these luxuries.

It was only later, when I knew Farman Shah better, that I realised that he was certain to demand from life a friend who possessed both beauty and bearing.

After the episode of fire and water, our relations became easier. Besides, I was too ill to make many demands other than those of the invalid.

On New Year’s Eve the whole of Peshawar went to the fancy-dress ball at the club. I sat by my fire and toasted my toes, drinking hot soup, and reading a murder-story lent by some well-wisher. The danger of fire had been removed by the carpenter and Farman Shah, who together had manufactured a guard out of a wooden soap-box covered with kerosene tins. It was a primitive affair, but it served its purpose. At nine o’clock, Farman Shah came to take away my tray, and I told him to return with the hot-water bottle in an hour, and to bring his bedding with him. He was to sleep on the floor of Clare’s room, that I might not have to rise at 4 a.m. to let her in.

Presently I finished my murder-story, and, being sensible that the cold air was blowing through the glass-panelled doors that led into the verandah, I bolted them, as the only means of keeping them shut. I thought without envy of the dinner-parties that were going on all over the cantonments; of the parties for sergeants and their families; of the Jocks merry-making in the calc across the compound—for my legs still felt like cotton wool. I undressed, and sat down, in my

dressing-gown, by the fire. It was a quarter to ten. The noise from the café had increased with every ten minutes. The Jocks were very drunk by now. I reflected uneasily upon what the Muslims must think of the white troops of the ruler. It seemed a pity that, in a Mohammedan province, where drink was, by order of the Prophet, prohibited, some way could not be devised, if the Jocks must be drunk, that they were drunk in their own lines.

Suddenly, with a burst as of thousand raging devils, the Jocks evacuated the café. They came pouring across the compound, and began to swarm round the bungalow. Shafts of light from the uncurtained skylight and round the edges of two windows and a door, where the curtains did not fit, slanted from my room across the dark compound. As insects attracted by the light, a party of them burst through the open doors into my verandah. Their hands were on the door leading into my room. They shook it till the wood-work creaked and the bolts rattled in their sockets. As I leaped to my feet, I thought grimly how nearly that door had not been bolted on the inside.

The question was, Would they break the glass and come pouring in on me? There was a door from the bathroom into the lane. But the soldiers were all round the house, and my escape was cut off. Mercifully, the bathroom door was bolted on the inside. I had noticed that while I was brushing my teeth. A door behind the wardrobe, if I could have moved the latter, led into the next suite. The bolt on each side was drawn, and, even if it had not been, the suite was empty. Everyone had gone to the ball. I was alone in the bungalow. The servants were out of reach in their go-downs at the back. There was no bell for me to ring ; no gong for me to beat. I was trapped.

I looked round the room and saw two arm-chairs and a sofa—no use, those—a small table and a small light chair ; but both would be snatched out of my hands before I could hurl them or break them over any head. Then I remembered. By Clare's bed-table was a chromium-plated electric torch

more than a foot long, with a heavy round head at the bulb end. I fetched it, and stood behind the curtains. If the door broke I'd crack the first head that appeared. Anyone crossing my threshold would get no quarter.

Suddenly the noise died as it had begun. There was an unearthly stillness. In the distance I heard a pie dog bark. I waited, holding the torch, ready to strike, for ten slow minutes. Then stealthily I parted the curtains and put my hand out to draw back the bolt. Instantly a voice spoke from the other side of the glass, so near that I jumped. It was Farman Shah's.

"Don't open that, Miss Sahib. Big soldiers here, all drunk. Don't open door."

"Are they in the verandah? Can't you get them out?"

"No, Miss Sahib, I can't get them out. Too big and too drunk."

"They must be got out. Go and find help. There must be someone in Peshawar. Are there no police?"

I went and sat by the fire. My head ached dully, and I was shaking with the after-effects of anger. A Mohammedan servant to protect me against my own nation! It was an ugly thought. Besides, I had been afraid. I had heard too many stories of the ways of drunken Jocks in Asia to enjoy the prospect of them bursting in upon me, weakened by fever and lightly clad in a crimson satin dressing-gown.

Following a silence, there were footsteps in the verandah and a low murmur of voices—then silence again. The noise of the Jocks had died away in the distance. Across the compound I heard a car pass in the Mall, taking belated guests to the ball. Suddenly I heard Farman Shah's voice: "Miss Sahib." I went to the door. "Open, Miss Sahib. All right now. Soldiers all gone."

I opened the door. Farman Shah stood there, holding the hot-water bottles. "Soldiers all very drunk," he said.

"Your religion doesn't allow you to drink?"

"No, Miss Sahib." He put the bottle in my bed. "I am going now to get my bedding."

He returned in a few moments, without his puggari, and with his bedding-roll in his arms. He wore a grey astrakhan fez pulled down above his eyebrows. He looked quite different—boyish, and much more human.

The next day I thanked him for standing bravely by me in the hour of my need instead of keeping safely away in his go-down at the back. It was never discovered how the soldiers had been removed from the verandah. In telling the tale, even in Hindustani, to my cousins, he became incoherent with excitement, and to the end we never knew what had happened. But from that day he became something of a hero in my eyes, and in his own.

He may have felt that, although I appreciated his courage and fidelity, I was not sufficiently alive to his merits as a servant. In any case, I was sitting in the sunshine, writing letters, one afternoon towards the end of January, when he appeared, with a tragic countenance, and laid a telegram on my knee. I read : " Come at once, your mother dying."

I handed the telegram to my cousin, and looked at Farman Shah. " Please, Miss Sahib, I must go home. I must have six days to go home."

" Well," my cousin said, " in the circumstances, I am afraid you can't refuse."

They began to discuss details in Hindustani. His home was six hours away in the Punjab. He would go by the early-morning train, and be back on the evening of the seventh day ; meantime, he would find a reliable, conscientious man to take his place. I paid no attention. The sunshine had darkened for me as I realised how much my comfort depended on Farman Shah.

" When did you pay him last ? " my cousin asked, as we watched the tall, lean figure go out at the gate.

" On the 3rd of January, when his wages were due."

" Well, that's in his favour. You know, it may be true. Or he may want to be at home for the celebrations at the end of the Ramazan ; or to see his wife before you go off to the south."

"Yes," I said gloomily. Deep in my soul a suspicion lingered that he was going because of the coal. Our friends told us that our coal bill was ridiculous—one fire, and three maunds of coal every nine days. One friend declared that she only used four maunds for her whole house—for dining-room, drawing-room, bedroom, and nursery fires. When she had gone I tackled Farman Shah. I said that it was disgraceful, and I implied that he must either be selling part on his own, or that he supplied not only his own go-down with fuel, but the go-down of his friend, and the go-downs of all the bearers on the Mall. Farman Shah flamed with indignation. He called heaven to be his witness. Every bit of coal had been used in that fire, except the portion that was his own legitimate perquisite. His vehemence was such that I was forced to believe him.

That night I dined in the house of the friend who consumed four maunds in nine days. Her rooms were enormous, with high vaulted ceilings. The skylights did not fit into their frames, and the icy night air blew about the necks of the guests. In each fireplace there smouldered two small pieces of coal the size of a potato.

The next day I retracted my words. Farman Shah received my apology with a disdainful smile. And now he was preparing to leave me.

During the course of a tea-party, he summoned my cousin to inspect the substitute. "He'll do," she told us. "His references are good, and he looks respectable. But he's old, and you must be patient."

That night I was dining out. Farman Shah went out to the car with me. He was dignified, and I tried to meet his high mood suitably, expressing my regret, and the hope that his mother might soon be out of danger. He salaamed, and I stepped into the car. Unfortunately, I trod on my dress, and the last sight that Farman Shah had of his employer was on all fours.

I awoke the next morning to find a little old man with a long beard standing by my bed. A feeling of despair shook

me. Supposing that Farman Shah did not return, and that I was tied to this creature for the rest of my stay in India?

"What is your name?" I asked.

The reply sounded like something between Pillar Box and Pibroch. Later, we discovered it to be Pir Buksh. He remained to us, however, Pillar Box, although his appearance suggested nothing more than a rather dirty old Father Christmas.

How slowly the days passed. I longed for the sight of that peacock muffler! Pir Buksh was eminently honest and respectable, but slow—ye gods! how slow and gentle and supine. We certainly saved money over coal—that perhaps was the bitterest touch of all. Pir Buksh lit a fire and in a moment it was out, and not all the coaxing in the world would make it burn. We did not ask for one whose face would launch a thousand ships and burn the topless towers of Ilium, but we did require a bearer who was capable of making one fire remain alight.

The evening before Farman Shah was due to return, I was sitting alone in my room. It was between nine o'clock and half past. I was reading, and had reached the lines:

*For love is a chain between foes, and love is a sword between friends.
Shall never be love without hatred? Not since the world began,*

when I was aware that I was no longer alone. There had been no sound that my ears had heard, but that other sense had registered the fact that a presence was in the room. I looked up, and, behold! between the parted curtains stood Farman Shah.

Now it was his habit, as is the habit of all good bearers, to knock before entering a room that served the purpose of bedroom as well as sitting-room. To-night, however, in order to dramatise the moment to take me unawares, he had walked in unannounced. It had been his plan to surprise me by arriving twenty-four hours before his appointed time, and to burst upon my delighted eyes. The plan succeeded. I forgot the existence of letters that warned against

familiarity. I cried out : " Farman Shah ! How glad I am you've come back."

" Salaam, Miss Sahib," he said, and saluted.

" How is your mother ? "

" Not dead, but very sick."

He spoke with the utmost cheerfulness, and to this day I wonder whether the old lady ever had an hour's illness, for no more was heard of her health.

The next morning Pir Buksh was paid off, and a chit written recommending his honesty and respectability. It was over the question of how much was owing to him that it came to light that I had been paying Farman Shah five rupees a month more than he had been engaged for.

" But I told you, the first night you arrived, how much you were to give him." My cousin's voice implied that the folly and carelessness of her relations was sometimes beyond all bearing.

" Call Farman Shah," she told Pir Buksh.

" Oh, please, please ! This is all my fault. I'd rather pay the beastly five rupees every month. You can't blame Farman Shah."

" He was engaged for thirty rupees a month."

" It's a ridiculously small wage."

" These northerners don't expect more."

Farman Shah came. He looked at me, and probably he realised my unhappiness.

My cousin and he conversed in Hindustani. I understood a word here and there. Presently he salaamed, and departed.

" It's perfectly all right. He says, of course, he understood, but, when you paid him thirty-five rupees at the beginning of January, he thought you were giving him a Christmas present. You will hear no more about it."

There my cousin was wrong. Farman received his wages quietly at the beginning of February. That evening I found an envelope bearing my name propped against the mirror of my dressing-table. I opened it, and found the following epistle :

“ Sir,

“, with due respects and humble submission I beg to lay down the following few lines before your most favourable and kind consideration,

“ With your esteemed favour though I agreed to serve you at Rs. 30/-/-/ P.M., but your kind honour bestowed me the pay of last at Rs. 35/-/- P.M. happily. Sir I have got three childrens, wife and mother to carry on, who are always praying for your long life and prosperities. The servant of neighbourers is getting Rs. 40/-/- P.M., they are also two Misses. Both of the bearers of Mrs. Colonel are also getting the same Rate. I am requesting to continue my wages at the same Rate as last month only for the sake of pity as I am quite a poor man and have got no means to carry me and my childrens on except you & God.

“ P.T.O.

“ At last I promise to serve your honour with utmost zeal & honesty as possible, & as long as you are in India. I hope that my humble request will be considered, for which act of kindness I and my childrens shall always pray for your long life and prosperity. I beg to remain, Sir,

“ Your most obedient servant

“ FARMAN SHAH, Bearer,

“ Peshawar Cantt. 3.2.1933.”

The guiding principle of Farman Shah's life was loyalty to the Muslim tradition, which included loathing of the Hindus. In Peshawar, where the majority of the population was Mohammedan, this hatred remained concealed. Whatever he may have thought when I went to the café to tea with a Hindu, he kept his opinions to himself. It was only later, when we were on our travels in the States and Central Provinces, where the Muslims were in the minority, that all the latent race-hatred came to the surface. “ Dirty Hindu *banya* ” he exclaimed, and, when he called anyone that, the

man was damned in this world and the next. It was useless to argue with him. The Mohammedans in Moghul days had ruled the land from the Frontier to the south.

"Well, but the Hindus were there before that. And the Maurya Dynasty held the whole land, under the Buddhist emperor Asoka, three hundred years before the beginning of this era."

I was rather proud of this piece of knowledge, and the words rolled lightly off my tongue. Farman Shah was not impressed.

"We no could serve under Hindus of the south," he said coldly. "They are little and have black skins."

"Well, you aren't asked to serve under them," I replied crossly. "You are still under the British."

"When the British go, Pathans march ; and they march till they come to Madras."

"Oh ! You are impossible. Of all the menacing intolerances, religious fanaticism is the most dangerous."

He did not understand me. "Hindus believe in hand-making gods." It was his parting shot, and he fired it with a world of contempt in his voice.

Hand-making gods ! I liked the phrase, and, though it was not what Farman Shah meant, it was better to worship a hand-made god than one bought at Woolworth's for six-pence and turned out by the million, which so many of us in the West worship in these days of machinery and mass-production.

Apart from this anti-Hindu virus he had a genius for friendship. Wherever we went he immediately made a new friend, and always, we noticed, with someone of a superior character and tone. When we left Peshawar he took with him a letter of introduction to a Maharaja's palace, which was more than we did. He carried on a voluminous correspondence, and was for ever sending postcards of Moghul buildings to his friends in the north. He had the remorseless streak of revenge that is in all Pathans. Is it perhaps the reverse side of loyalty ? To a Pathan, forgiveness, the turning

of the other cheek, is an impossibility. Through a lifetime he will harbour a grievance, and a blood feud, begun over some small matter such as a stolen sheep, may persist through generations. Farman Shah had one grievance against me, and he stored it up, and when the time came he paid it off neatly.

The trouble, of course, was over a dhobie. It is always my misfortune when I travel abroad to find myself in trouble over a dhobie. Why one's washerman and one's servant should be intimate friends, and therefore touchy for each other's honour, I do not know. In justice to myself, I did not realise that the dhobie was a friend of Farman Shah. He appeared in my room during the day after my arrival, and I concluded that he was attached to the house. Therefore I forbore to complain. It was only on the eve of our departure that, on discovering that he had ruined some new underclothes made by the Kashmiri *dhursi*, it came to light that he had been foisted on to us by Farman Shah.

"His work has been disgraceful. He shall be punished. I shall only pay him half his wages."

Farman Shah stood still in the centre of the room and gazed into space.

"Go and tell him that now."

He waited for a moment to be certain that I was in earnest. Then he went, after giving me a look of dark reproach. "*Et tu, Brute!*" As I listened to the torrent of words pouring outside on the verandah I felt slightly uncomfortable. How I should have hated to be in Farman Shah's place.

Presently he returned, twisting his hands together. The blood had left his cheeks. He turned on my cousin, who was peacefully smoking by the fire. His voice rose shrilly; he was shaking. The words poured in a steady stream of Hindustani, rushing, tumbling over each other in their haste.

I sat by and watched, with difficulty checking the impulse to laugh. The imperturbability of my cousin's face, expressionless as a boot, while words burst about her head like

bombs, was in such ludicrous contrast to Farman Shah's shaking excitement that I could hardly control myself. Suddenly she leaned forward and threw the end of her cigarette into the fire. "I don't know what that man is talking about," she said quietly.

The flow ceased abruptly.

"Farman Shah, what is the matter?"

"Dhobie say he murder me if you not pay. He murder me to-night outside verandah."

"What utter nonsense," my cousin interposed. "If he was going to murder you, he'd do it without warning you first. You know that as well as I do."

He looked at me. "Miss Sahib knows that he will murder me if she doesn't pay."

I seemed to hear a voice say: "You must learn to laugh at murder in Peshawar." I was unprepared to laugh if it came as close as my own verandah.

"If you are murdered to-night, Farman Shah, we shan't be able to start in the morning," I said dispassionately, and looked across at my cousin.

"Yes," she conceded. "You'd better pay up in full. There'll be no peace till you do."

The dhobie was paid, and departed, smiling and salaaming. No more was said, and I imagined the incident closed. I was mistaken. I had come between Farman Shah and one of his friends, and I must be brought to account.

Some weeks later, the question arose in a friend's house as to how much should be given to the dhobie after a visit of a fortnight. The dhobie asked for ten rupees from each of us, which seemed reasonable. Farman Shah did not think that it was enough. Into this heated discussion walked our hostess, and it seemed wiser to put the matter to her for judgment. She agreed with the dhobie and us that twenty rupees was ample. Farman Shah stepped forward, and, with an accusing look at me, said loudly and firmly:

"Memsahib, Miss Sahib is here two weeks, and to your

dhobie she sends more washing than in all the ten weeks in Peshawar."

"Farman Shah ! How dare you say that ! What a disgustingly disloyal thing to say."

He walked proudly out on to the verandah, and shut the wire door behind him. It was his Parthian shot, and now the score was closed. He had let me down before my friend.

My hostess laughed. "But why are you angry with him ? He is not disloyal. He is proud that his Miss Sahibs change their clothes so often."

My hostess had one of the loveliest natures I have ever been privileged to meet, and from her own sweetness she judged others, incapable of imputing to them motives lower than her own.

I have since wondered whether Farman Shah's shot had been at random and, as such, had hit the bull's-eye by chance. Or whether, with the almost clairvoyant intuition of the Indian, he realised, perhaps subconsciously, that of all vices meanness, either spiritual or in fact, was the one I most hated and despised. Another point of resemblance between the Pathan and the Scot is that unwritten law of hospitality wherein a man is bound to lay before his guest his best and his all ; while, on the other side, the guest does not overstep this law riding roughshod across his host's generosity. Perhaps the Pathan in Farman Shah made him use that particular weapon of revenge, and, by accusing me of trespassing on the hospitality of my hostess's dhobie, had roused the Scots pride in me.

We never referred to the incident again. He had paid off the score, and so, his revenge satisfied, peace was fully restored, and in the interest of the weeks that followed I think we both forgot the existence of dhobies.

If he had triumphed over me in this matter, his real success came soon after, and, like many greater conquests, it was unknown to him. It was not smallness on my part that prevented me from telling him. They said I considered his feelings too much, that the way to treat "them" was rough,

and to tell "them" nothing. I did not want to undermine discipline, so I kept the telling until my last day, and then, alas ! my own unhappiness at leaving India swallowed up everything else.

It was after the Raja's birthday party, when His Highness was bidding us farewell. I was trying to thank him suitably for his hospitality—mercifully there was no Farman Shah near to put in his word—and for the way he had made us and our servant comfortable.

"I hear you have a very excellent servant," the Raja said graciously.

I gasped. Was Farman Shah's excellence bruited abroad throughout the camp, so that it finally reached the ears of princes ? My head went up. "He is from the north," I said proudly. "He is a Pathan."

A general smile went round the drawing-room. The indulgent looks seemed to say : "She has given her loyalty to the north."

I am from the north myself, and in the Pathan I found much that resembled my own people, and much that I could understand and respect. In that sense I had given my loyalty to the north, and, once given, can it ever be taken back ? But how could I explain to the Raja that, although I am of the north, my eyes have always strayed wantonly to the south, and that, although my head has stayed in the Highlands, my heart has journeyed south ? Can one give one's loyalty to one race and one's love to another ? Can one live in two worlds ; or what one gives to one, is it taken from the other ? The whole men of the world are those whose eyes are rooted to the ground they till—who do not look into their neighbours' gardens and sigh for what they have not got.

CHAPTER IV

THE KHYBER PASS

BEYOND THE BARBED WIRE the road to Jamrud ran straight across a dusty plain of coarse pasture and arable land. Between the cantonments and Islamia College there were tamarisk-trees bordering the road, but beyond that there was nothing but the bare plain. A string of camels rested under the last of the trees, and one with a fuzzy back, more adventurous than his friends, nibbled at the lower branches. A donkey went tripping by, delicately picking his way, and apparently unconscious of the heavy weight of his owner, who sat well back on the animal's haunches.

Jamrud stands like a battleship guarding the entrance to the pass. Behind the fort the mountains rise abruptly out of the plain ; a beautiful sandstone wall that seems rose-coloured in the dawn, turns to brown and amber in the noon, and at evening takes on a delicate mauve and green light like an ultra-violet ray.

There was a waiting crowd of Afridis at Jamrud. There were introductions and hand-shakes. They were fine-looking men, with fair skins and the physique of mountain people. There was a book to sign—a statement to make of the number of the car's occupants, its number, and hour of return. The car sped on again ; the fort was on the right of the road, a native town on the left. The slow twisting ascent began : seven miles to do 2,000 feet up to Shagai Fort. Suddenly, almost before one is aware, the pass has been entered. The bare sandstone mountains enclose the road on either side like walls. The road divides into two, and there is a sign picturing a motor-car and a camel. The motor road

branches to the right. There is also a railway, cut through the rock, that goes as far as the Afghan frontier, and is the Khyber's bow to modernity. There are, however, few trains in the day, and the feelings of the pass are seldom outraged by the sight or sound of it. The road turned round, and at every turn a fresh ridge of hills sprang up. We were surrounded by mountain : mountain above us, mountain below us, mountain pressing upon the road. The bare rock-like surface of the hills was here and there dotted with camel-thorn and a strange low, dark-emerald bush. Otherwise there was no visible sign of life, either animal or vegetable. Yet there was an awareness that we were not alone. Those seemingly bare hills might be stiff with watching Afridis for all that we knew.

At intervals there were pickets held by the British, Bagiari, Sheshai Kila. Looking back over our shoulders as the road turned and rose, the mouth to the pass was visible, opening to the plain beyond. Shagai Fort stands, blushing faintly at its own importance, in a basin of the hills, guarded by the highest mountain in the pass that throws up a rose-coloured head 5,000 feet into the sparkling air. The fort has loop-holed walls and steel shutters for protection instead of conventional windows. But the steel frames held pictures of mountain-tops peering over other mountain-tops, and hills rising upon hills ; and in the courtyard of the fort a band played "Zakhmi Dil," and some graceful Afghan dogs chased each other round a wire enclosure.

The cars were left behind at Shagai, and the second part of the journey was by open lorry. The men, more in honour of the day than out of necessity, were armed. Beyond the fort the road again twisted and turned through incredibly wild country. But the sun smiled down, and the peace of God was in the air, only broken occasionally by the rustle and whirr of a vulture flying across the road in front of the lorry. We passed walled native villages—each with its fortified look-out tower—and by Ali Masjid Gorge, a place of many wells and much clean water, coming in that barren land from heaven

knows how many fathoms deep. By Kala Kushta, we went past a strange, round, ruined tower that men with poetic minds say Alexander built when he went his conquering way down the Khyber. The practical reply is that it is a Buddhist stupa, built during the reign of the great king Kanishka, because Alexander never went that way at all. Between Ali Masjid and Zintara the country opens out, the mountains hold back, and there is a fertile plain.

This side of Landi Kotal there is the caravanserai where the trains of camels rest, laden with merchandise, on their journey from Afghanistan to Peshawar. From Kabul come apples and raisins and pistachio-nuts, and the white Kabuli grapes that are sold in smooth round boxes. From Bokhara and Teheran the camels bring carpets and richly coloured fabrics, and the embroidered camel-bags that make stool-covers. Bokhara rugs, Kabuli grapes—magic names. The *powindah* people, with their caravans, rest in the serai, and sell their blankets and shawls and camels' hair coats. In the road above the serai, lorries, painted with flowers or pictures of elephants and the Taj, rattled past, carrying wild-looking men. These lorries ply, like buses, between Kabul and Peshawar, bringing Afghans on secret business to the city.

Beyond Landi Kotal, with its fort and shops and squash-rackets courts, is Landi Khana, and beyond that is Michni Kandao, with a picket on the left, and a frowning mountain on the right, and, across the two roads for car and camel, an iron gate that shuts India off from Afghanistan.

A short steep climb brought us to the picket, and, standing with our hands on the barbed wire, we looked across a wide plain to the further ridges where Afghanistan begins. To the left was Bagh Fort, on the last of British soil. A hillside rose sharply behind the fort, on whose summit were scattered skulls from the Afghan wars.

Standing in that brilliant mountain air, looking across the no man's land to the white peaks of the Hindu Kush, gave me a strange feeling, as if I had suddenly turned a sharp corner and were entering upon a new phase of existence. I

was standing with my feet just outside the back door of India, and civilisation—the civilisation that I knew—ended with my body. Inside me at that moment there was something that stirred, born of that small moment, that was to flower later into an experience of the spirit: an experience of absolute significance that was to compensate for the final defeat that India dealt me.

Across that dark plain the brown hills rose, and above them the snow-tops of the Hindu Kush. Beyond that, somewhere lost from sight, was Jellalabad, and, further on, that place of debatable issues, Kabul, where no English-woman, under any pretext, might go. How many miles to Kabul? Could I get there and back by candlelight?—Most certainly not; but in that moment there came upon me the knowledge that I had to go to Kabul, whatever it might cost me.

I came down from the picket feeling slightly transfigured, but since no one commented upon it, except to say that I was very dusty, I probably exaggerate the effect that Michni Kandao had upon my countenance. The process that leads to re-birth may be instantaneous but it is also private, and nothing whatsoever to do with one's neighbour.

On the way back to Shagai we encountered a procession of Afridi women and children returning from a wedding. The women wore long black trousers, black tunics edged with scarlet embroidery, and over their heads a black cotton *chaddar* with a red or yellow border. The men in the lorry shouted greetings to the women, the younger of whom responded, becoming excited and unruly, screaming with laughter and shouting. The old grandmother in charge of the party was disgusted, and vainly tried to check them. Finding that they did not notice her, she turned upon my cousin, and rated him for encouraging this unseemly behaviour.

"Come, mother," he answered. "Why are you angry? What shame is there in 'aughter?"

After luncheon we climbed up to a picket on the left of

Shagai. I still felt somewhat light-headed. It may have been the effect of the mountain air, and not, as I imagined, my experience at Michni Kandao. The others were in front, chattering and taking photographs. Desmond waited for me to catch up. "Kabuli grapes," I murmured, half under my breath.

He laughed. "I am afraid part of you got left behind at the barrier. Have you no eyes for this end of the pass?"

"No, none. . . . Across the plain, across the hills to Jellalabad. I suppose one spends the night there; then on next day to Kabul."

"After Kabul?"

"No after Kabul. Just Kabul. It ends there."

"No, my dear, believe me, it doesn't end there. It only begins there. From Kabul through Afghanistan, through Russia to Archangel, across the sea to the North Pole——"

"And then you fall down the other side."

"Yes, and come up in the South Pole, and work your way up again northward, till you end where you began—in Peshawar."

"Well, then, if it is a circle, I shall end where I began—at Michni Kandao. So what matter?"

"It would be better to begin and end in London."

"But, after all, Kabul is more a state of mind really than a place, isn't it?"

"That is just what I am trying to tell you."

"But, then, my Kabul and your Kabul are probably quite different. Mine may be entirely noble and disinterested."

"I only know one woman," Desmond said slowly, "who got the Frontier virus really badly, and in the end it killed her."

"Tell me about her—as a warning, perhaps."

"Oh, it took her quite differently from you! Your way might end you in purdah—dull, dirty, unspeakably monotonous. But, if it did, it would be an accidental, or incidental, fate, not your own choosing, as hers was. Agnes was married, and brought out to Peshawar on her honeymoon. She had

a sensitiveness and a strong will—a bad combination for British India. She was very certain that she was not going to fall into the ordinary rut of the memsahib, bungalow-club-golf-course existence. There were other things on the Frontier besides cantonment society. Perhaps if they had given her work to do—welfare and purdah parties—it might have been all right. But they didn't ; they brought her up the Khyber instead, and she responded violently. This was what she had always needed—this bare, bleak country was full of fire and romance. You know the kind of thing. I am not insulting you by suggesting that that was what got you at Michni Kandao. . . . Well, John was like most British husbands, a tower of strength on a rough day or when the burglars burst into the house—as a woman once said to me: 'The Englishman is the only possible husband. He doesn't mind if you are ill in front of him'—but, as far as romance was concerned, rather stolid and slow.

"Agnes was always planning excursions up the Khyber, any excuse to get up here and sit looking out of a car window, mooning at the mountains. John hadn't the time to be taking her, nor the inclination. His work was in Peshawar, and he wanted to spend his leisure out with the Peshawar Hunt. Well, the hot weather came, and Agnes wouldn't go up to Kashmir, nothing would induce her to leave her beloved Khyber. She said it was like living in the Old Testament, the hills had a biblical flavour, and Kashmir would be smug and British-run. The truth was, she had found a companion to take her up the pass—a young Russian whom she had known in London. He was supposed to be studying Indian music. He wasn't a Bolshevik or anything like that. His family had got him out of Russia after the Revolution. I suppose chance brought him to Peshawar. Agnes and he made a great work with each other, always playing and singing that depressing Russian folk-music, or coming up here to rave over the hills. I don't know what the orderly thought, or the chauffeur—o ; rather, I suppose they were the only two who guessed the truth.

"Then one day they were off in a hired car, and they didn't stop at the barrier. It was before the trouble, and women could get to Kabul then. I don't know whether she went on her own passport, or whether the Russian got one forged. I was away at the time, in England, and when John came back the greater evil swallowed up the lesser details."

"What happened? Did they stay in Kabul?"

"Not long, I fancy. There was nothing for them there. They got to Russia somehow, and after that the mists closed round them."

"Did John divorce her?"

"John was killed in a motor accident in England three months after she left him."

"Is that all?"

"As far as John is concerned, and, in one way, as far as Agnes was. But just the other day, two Russians, a man and a woman, came down the Khyber and landed at the Dak bungalow in Peshawar, without money or anything beyond the clothes they stood up in. They had come from Russia, on foot, and wanted to make their way to Bombay. The man thought he had friends there who might help them—Portuguese, if the story was true—as they wanted passage-money to get them to Paris. They couldn't go back to Russia as they were anti-Soviet, and there was nothing for them in Persia. He could draw and paint a little, and wanted to make a living doing cartoons of people. He spoke very little English, and the woman, who was fluent, kept in the background, coughing her life away, and smoking endless cigarettes. They sent one of our Indian officials to investigate their case. Peshawar isn't exactly cordial to Russians, you know. He it was who spotted that the woman was English. They began to press their enquiries, and discovered that the woman was, or had been, Agnes. She had got a new Russian. The first had disappeared, but this second was her husband, or said he was. We fitted them out with money and clothes, and shipped them off as quickly as possible."

"Did you see Agnes?"

"No. I spared her that final humiliation. They told me she had aged beyond recognition. You see, if you go up the Khyber in all the pride of youth and love, and then fate sends you limping down it again, defeated and dying, you don't want your friends or relations—John was my cousin—to see you."

"What possessed her to go back to Peshawar?"

"Hunger. They were starving, and India was the hope between them and death."

"Was it?"

"No. They got as far as Lahore, and she died in a female ward of the hospital there. The man was pushed off to Bombay, and took ship for France, but whether the French consented to let him stay, I don't know."

The shadows were beginning to lengthen and the colour of the hills to turn to violet. The others were shouting for us to hurry up. Going down the pass, Desmond sat in front, by the chauffeur. It was a silent drive, as we were tired after the long hours in the keen air.

In the plain beyond Jamrud, a *powindah* encampment was ready for the night. The strange, pointed tents were put up in a way that defied the fastest wind, an art that the ancestors of these *powindahs* had learned in the far-off days when the Old Testament books were being written.

While the good nights were being exchanged, I said to Desmond: "I am still unshaken. You see, my pilgrimage is going to be undertaken alone."

"Then you will most certainly end in purdah."

CHAPTER V

THE MOHMAND BORDER

I MET THE KHAN at a dinner-party during my first week in Peshawar. *Khan* may mean lord or chief, or it may merely mean "Mr." To refer to him, however, as Mr. A., conjures up a vision of a small man of the type who calls to read the gas-meter, and the Khan was the antithesis of that. He was built on the heroic scale, with a commanding presence and much natural dignity. He was not one who would pass unnoticed in a crowd. His appearance was somewhat conspicuous, and he possessed that quality which, for want of a better name, is called personality—the power to put other people in the shade. I never heard him raise his voice or in any way try to override the wishes of others, and, as he usually looked at people through half closed eyes, it was difficult to read his expression. Yet, from almost the first encounter, I knew instinctively that if it ever came to a clash of wills, it would be his and not mine that would prevail. It was probably this very fact that constituted the charm and novelty of the acquaintance.

There was also another side that tended to foster the acquaintanceship. Like all who aspire to greatness, he had, as well as his friends and admirers, a number of detractors. These were only too glad to warn me against him. One even went so far as to assert that the Khan was the modern embodiment of the green bay-tree. There is nothing like an element of disapproval to vitalise a situation, and that faint suggestion that one may be risking more than appears on the surface lends a sense of valour and importance to an otherwise prosaic occasion. If the Khan had known what dark

charges I was obliged to defend him against, he would have been surprised and shocked to the foundations of his very conservative Mohammedan being. For, as is the nature of things, the more I defended, the wilder and more absurd grew the charges : the bay-tree put forth branches daily, according to the detractors. One of his own race, who, it is supposed, knew him better than we did, remarked one day : " The thing about the Khan is that no one could ever impute any evil to him."

Not being a mischief-maker, I examined my hands in silence.

The evening before we went to the Mohmand Border, one of those jesting friends came, full of dark prophecy. My cousin looked anxious. She knew that it was only a joke, yet there is always the lurking remembrance of the true word spoken.

" You must take Evelyn with you in the Khan's car. In the event of trouble, Evelyn would really be much better than a man."

Evelyn looked up from the stocking she was darning.

" I don't know whether that is a compliment or an insult," she said.

We left the cantonments immediately after breakfast, Evelyn and I in the Khan's car, my cousins following with Clare in theirs. There had been rain in the night, and there were banks of cloud in the sky and the sunshine was of a tender, quiet quality reminiscent of Europe. Out of the cantonments and along the Michni Road we drove, along an avenue of pale, fluffy tamarisk-trees, straight on towards the Hindu Kush. The mountains ahead of us rose like an immense indigo wall out of the plain. It was a day of lovely lights, and the shadows on the hills were a dark purple that melted to rose-colour in the distance. We crossed the Michni bridge, and saw the Kabul River winding and twisting between low banks covered with stumpy trees, and in the distance a dim outline of hills towards the Malakand. It has a strange, impelling fascination, this borderland, with its wide, bare plains and steep, rugged hills.

Beyond the bridge was Michni Fort, and the garrison was all lined up in front to present arms. Inside the fort, in the courtyard, there was the grave of an Englishman who was killed there. The border country is covered with the graves of English, killed or dead from sunstroke or fever : strange, lonely graves, without cross or monument.

Sitting on the wall of the fort, we looked across the plain, with its scattered trees and low, coarse bushes, to the hills of the Mohmand territory. It was the end of British rule, and in those bare hills 80,000 Mohmandmen live, and, although trouble is liable to burst out at any moment, there is an excellent scheme whereby Government sees that each headman receives money for keeping his friends quiet. Looking across that tranquil plain to the empty, rugged hills, it was difficult to think of anything as ugly as war. The peace and beauty of it made me catch my breath.

My sigh was echoed by the Khan. I turned and saw him looking wistfully over the plain. He shook his head sadly. "It is all spoilt now. The aeroplane has spoilt it all. No more lovely fighting. The tribal wars are not the same now. It is a tragedy !"

Outside the fort a long, straight road went towards Shabkadr Fort. We passed by small villages of hard-baked mud, and trains of furry camels with their loads of wood, and minute, thin donkeys carrying baskets of stones. Pic dogs rushed out and barked madly at the dust we left behind us. The road was straight and the springs of the car were good, and I forbore to look at the speedometer.

Outside Shabkadr the ground rose abruptly. At the top of the hill the first houses of the village appeared. There were drawn-up tongas waiting for a hire. Crowds came out of the doorways and stared at us. They recognised the Khan and shouted excited greetings. The road forked in two : one branch went to the right, towards the Kabul River ; the other turned sharply left towards the mountains. In the fork stood Fort Shabkadr.

The driver took the turn to the left with a beautiful sweep.

About 500 yards down the road the Khan gave an order, and the car stopped ; we looked back. There was no sign of my cousins. Two camels were moving slowly down the road towards the fort. A tribesman came up and began an animated conversation in Pushtu with the Khan. Presently he went away, following in the dusty wake of the camels. Across the plain we could see obliquely the white ribbon that was the road from Michni Fort. There was neither sight nor sound of a car.

We talked pleasantly of the difference between Pushtu and Persian. Evelyn said in a still, small voice : "What a perfect spot for an abduction !"

I kicked her quickly on the shin, and, smiling sweetly at the Khan in the front seat, I declared that Persian art owed a great debt to China.

Presently the conversation died out. The Khan was very restive. "I think we must go back," he said. "They must have had a puncture."

Another order, and the car was turned. "Fate never forgives a missed opportunity," Evelyn remarked, but the Khan and I were too anxious to pay any attention to her levity.

At the foot of the hill outside Shabkadr we met a lorry coming from Michni. The Khan stopped the lorry and questioned the driver, who replied in a rapid flow of Pushtu. The Khan was sitting sideways in the front seat beside the driver. His arm was along the back of the seat, a few inches above our knees. I was watching him closely, trying to read his face. An Englishman would have exclaimed or changed countenance. The Khan's face was impassive, and his arm remained relaxed along the back of the seat. He asked a question very quietly. I knew that it was a question by the inflexion. Was it telepathy, or was his voice a shade too elaborately casual ? For, even as he spoke, I knew that he had turned cold. The lorryman answered in another burst. The Khan replied sharply, bitterly, and waved him on. He turned to me. Perhaps I looked as sick as I felt.

"Now, now, I promise you, it's all right." He was laughing with relief. "But that fool did frighten me. He said : 'There are two cars lying on the road,' and I asked him why they are lying on the road, and the fool replies : 'Because one of them has broken down.' But there is no one hurt ; he swears it."

The two cars were standing by the roadside, a mile beyond Michni Fort. The second car belonged to friends who, having heard of our expedition, had driven that way in our sheltering wake. Ten minutes after my cousin's steering-gear broke, they arrived upon the scene. The damage had just been repaired as we drove up in a cloud of dust. My cousin was sitting at the edge of the road, beside Clare, reiterating with the calmness of despair : "Of course, I shall be blamed for this. But I have nothing to reproach myself with. I provided Evelyn. I did by best, and I would rather she had Evelyn than anyone."

In the relief at finding that we had not been given to the first *malik* in exchange for a rifle, she was ready to send us off to the topmost peak of the Hindu Kush.

We watched the other two cars return, defeated, towards Peshawar. I thought there was a gleam of amusement in the Khan's eye as he said good-bye. I saw him counting the cartridges in my cousin's belt, and with an effort restrained myself from saying : "My dear Khan Sahib, we may ride alone and unarmed through tribal country because you aspire to greatness." I should have been obliged to add, in truth : "All the same, I feel infinitely safer with you than I should in an armoured car, because you are known and feared by all these tribesmen."

Beyond Shabkadr the country grew wilder, and at the other side of Matta Post the road ended. The car had to continue its journey bumping over the plain, along a track that was marked only by a line of white stones as a guide, towards the mountains. Presently we came parallel to an old Mohammedan canal whose beginning was long ago, in the days of the Moghuls. Having been bumped and shaken until

the bottom nearly fell out of the car, we found ourselves at the Swat River. The water was running rather low, as there had been no real Christmas rains this year, flowing quietly over a clean, stony floor in colour like a pale aquamarine. An enormous dam had been built over the river, with a steel line ladder, very high and slippery, leading to the bridge of the dam.

We left the car by the bank of the river and stepped out into a world of peace and silence that was extraordinary. One solitary picket on the bare hillside looked across the water to Munda Post, that, surrounded by a clump of dark trees, stood on the edge of that broad, glassy river whose fringes were darkened by the reflections of the fort and the trees. There was no sound of life, not even the cry of a bird, to break the silence. We had reached the end of the world.

We scrambled up the steel ladder on to the bridge, the Khan going in front, which I thought showed a ready tact. Unfortunately, on our return however, Evelyn spoilt his manœuvre by pushing forward and skipping up ahead of us. But no doubt the Khan had by this time his own estimate of Evelyn. "That cousin likes food," he said of her one day, which was unjust, as she was not the only one who liked food. But, then, food plays such a small part in the life of the Muslim that doubtless he is apt to impute greed to the Christian where greed, as we know it, does not exist.

At Munda Post there was a presentation of arms, and the strength of the fort—there were about eight of them—turned out to greet the Khan, who became clearly the leader, ignoring the feminine cattle who crept humbly in his wake. The post was like a big fort, but, passing through the doors at the back, one walked straight on to the plain, and there was not even a wire between us and the end of civilisation.

We drove back to Shabkadr as fast as the road permitted and were received at the fort by the second-in-command, a friend of the Khan's. The Englishman in charge was spending the week-end in Peshawar, so we had the fort to ourselves. Our host diligently showed us everything that could

be seen in the fort, and then rewarded us with a superb view of the plain of Peshawar, surrounded by mountains, that the top of the fort afforded. I heard a murmur of "*Feringhi kana*" (foreign food), to which I paid no attention, as I was trying to pretend that I could see the smoke from Peshawar City rising out of the plain. Our host led us down from the top of the fort and took us to his room.

The sight of a roaring fire, and table drawn temptingly near it, brought me to earth, and, glancing at the clock on the mantelpiece, I was amazed to see that the hands pointed to three o'clock. We had not touched food since an eight-o'clock breakfast.

"I am hungry," I began, then checked myself. It was the time of the Ramazan, the annual Muslim fast that is the equivalent of our Lent. During this month no Muslim may eat between sunrise and sunset. In the circumstances, to express great joy at the sight of food would have been hardly tactful.

Having seen us seated at the table, the Khan disappeared. He told us that he had business to transact, and no doubt he had ; but it was also more than human flesh could bear to watch others eat when he himself must keep the fast till sunset. Our poor host, on the other hand, though abstaining himself, plied us with sandwiches and ginger-snaps and a prodigious iced chocolate cake. The tea had been stewing for an hour in a tall Russian teapot, as we were much later than had been arranged, owing to the mishap to the cousin's car. However, we drank out of lovely old Russian cups of a deep wine-red that our host had bought in Peshawar City. It was a genuine set—the loot, probably, from some palace—and I trembled as Evelyn insisted upon examining the underneath of the cake-plate in order to find its mark. It was an impressive gesture, no doubt, indicating a knowledge that I knew she did not possess. Our host, however, was much too polite to show any anxiety. Nor was his fortitude put to the test, because in the end no china fell.

After we had eaten our fill, Evelyn included, we were

shown a beautiful old Persian carpet and some Bokhara rugs. Our host was evidently a man of taste. He had a fair skin and blue eyes, and, apart from his black beard, might have passed for an Englishman who in jest has put on Pathan clothes. His room in all its details resembled an Englishman's : a dressing-table with shaving-mirror, pots of cream, bottles neatly arranged ; a bed covered with a Kashmiri bedspread ; a shelf of books. On the mantelpiece were photographs of his friends in tennis flannels. Later, Evelyn declared that she had seen a bundle of washing tied up in a dhurrie, ready for the dhobie, under one of his windows. "An Englishman would have shoved it into the bathroom if he expected women to lunch."

"No doubt he would," I replied. "But a Pathan, having a more natural mind, offered the hospitality of his bathroom to his guests, which an Englishman would not have done."

After we had admired the possessions of our host, the Khan returned to tell us that it was time to go.

"We shall go home the other way," he said.

"But the first bridge," our host interposed, "did you not know that it was broken in the flood last week?"

"Yes, I do know."

"But you cannot take your heavy car across the river by the boats."

The Khan's eyes were almost shut. His face became a mask of expressionless obstinacy. "My friends wish to see the Kabul River."

Our host turned to me. "The Khan's car is extremely heavy, and the boats are of the flimsiest. It would be most unsafe to try."

I was silent. A day in the Khan's company had made me a complete fatalist. If it were the will of Allah that I drowned in the Kabul River, then it was my destiny.

"We shall go that way in any case." The Khan spoke blandly. "If we have to return, it is only a matter of six miles."

Our host came to the gate of the fort to see us start.

The steep road from the fort was thronged with tribesmen, come to collect their wages for keeping the border quiet. They looked with awe and admiration at the Khan.

About three miles down the road to the left we came to the river. The bridge had broken neatly in the middle. The banks of the river were crowded with coolies and donkeys carrying stones, all pretending that they were working at top pressure. Two most insecure-looking boats had been tied together and a raft laid over them. When we arrived on the scene the raft was crowded, and they were on the point of pushing off for the further shore. The Khan leapt out of the car and ordered them to stop. Four mules, one tonga, and a dozen people meekly removed themselves from the raft.

By this time we had stepped out of the car. Evelyn was bending anxiously over the prostrate form of a donkey. "I know it's broken its leg!" she wailed. "What can we do? It must be shot immediately. Go and tell the Khan."

"My dear Evelyn, the Khan is unarmed. I agree now that our cousin's way is, after all, the better. But it is too late to think of that now. I repeat, the Khan is unarmed, and you can't wring a donkey's neck as if it were a chicken. Besides, I honestly don't think there is anything the matter with its leg. It is merely resting. Look, its eyes aren't full of pain."

"These loathsome people don't care what happens to their animals."

"You are behaving like a fussy, sentimental British spinster."

"And you're behaving like a cold-blooded Pathan."

"Hush! This is not the moment for a family brawl. The Khan is calling us."

We turned, to find that the car had been driven on to the raft; the Khan was signalling for us to hurry up.

"But we can't leave that dying donkey."

"If it is dying, we shan't leave it long. Don't worry. We shall all meet in paradise in about ten minutes."

There were on the raft, besides the car and ourselves, fifty-four men, three donkeys, and two purdah women

dressed up in white sheets. I give them in order of their marketable value. The boats were hauled across the river by means of ropes worked on a pulley from the further shore.

Strange to say, we did not go to the bottom. When we were safely landed on the other side, the Khan said, rubbing his hands triumphantly : " Well, I was determined that you should do that. It was really rather dangerous, but one must take a risk in this world."

The Kabul River twists and turns, and we had to cross it again at the Nagomen Bridge, at the Nulla Bridge, and yet again once more before we were on the Peshawar road. The sun was just about to set as we drove through the cantonments. " Just in time for your food," we told the Khan.

The next night I sat at dinner beside one of those in authority. I had been telling him about our day in the Mohmand Border, and casually I referred to the crossing of the Kabul River.

" But why on earth did you go by boat when there are four perfectly good bridges ? "

" But the first bridge is broken. Didn't you know ? "

" Which bridge ? "

" The one after Shabkadr."

" That great steel bridge ? What absolute nonsense ! "

" It was broken in the flood last week."

" I am very sorry, but I don't believe you."

I shrugged my shoulders and continued to eat *byculla soufflé*.

" Are you serious ? "

" Absolutely serious. I haven't got a practical mind that could invent details about rafts."

" Who broke that bridge ? "

" I don't know."

He looked at me rather searchingly.

I laughed uneasily. " I am not conceited enough to imagine that the bridge was broken for our especial benefit, if that is what you mean."

He sighed. " One does get so tired of it all sometimes."

“ But,” I said, to comfort him, “ is the breaking of a bridge so very important ? ”

“ I put it to you. Supposing, in England——”

“ Ah, but steel bridges are never cut in two in England.”

“ No, and that is just the point of the story,” he said bitterly.

CHAPTER VI

THE MALAKAND

“MY BELLY,” said the Khan, “is not my god.”

“I hope mine isn’t, either,” I replied doubtfully. I was thinking of the long hours between breakfast at half past seven and dusk, when the car drove back through the gates into the cantonments.

“We Muslims do not live to eat.” The Khan’s manner was exceedingly lofty.

“We Christians don’t, either,” I replied mildly. “But, as the Ramazan is over, surely there is no reason why we shouldn’t take something with us? We could stop on the way to the Malakand and eat on the road.”

I had a pleasant vision of the Khan seated under a tree, eating sandwiches, and I smiled upon him in an ingratiating way, at the same time admiring his new striped tie and coat, which had been bought to celebrate the feast that marked the end of the Ramazan.

But the Khan, who, no doubt, had done little else but eat for the last twenty-four hours, was not in a mood to think of food. “We will take a little fruit. It is not good to eat too much in the day.”

Then his manner relaxed, and he added, more genially : “We have much to see, and dangerous ground to cover. We shall go to Charsadda, the hotbed of the Red-Shirt movement.”

As he spoke, the Khan’s eyes twinkled. We were sitting in the verandah, and the morning air was chilly. In my room, Farman Shah was flapping a duster, while Jamadad, the sweeper, with a whirl of twigs, was sending all the dust into

Clare's room. Had we not been in the verandah, the dust could have gone straight out into the garden. As it was, it had to go through Clare's room, through the bathroom into the lane. Dustpans and brushes don't exist in India, which is probably one reason why it is a land of dust.

I was seated primly on a hard chair opposite the Khan. It was a cold morning, and I had not expected an early caller. I wore a geranium-red flannel riding-shirt—a garment to which I was attracted by reason of its colour, and because I fancied myself in it. I did not usually inflict it upon the notice of my friends, however, to whom it was apt to appear as the proverbial red rag. The Khan was smiling into his beard.

"Come," I said in self-defence, "one red shirt doesn't make a revolution."

"It was I who put down the trouble in Charsadda."

"Then you would rather I didn't show myself like this at your side in Charsadda, in case your old enemies think that you have undergone a change of heart?"

"It matters not in the least what you wear. I am known there."

"And feared?" The Khan made an eloquent movement with his hands. But when I went with him to the verandah door he was still smiling.

Breakfast was brought at half past seven. It was dark, but the air was warm, for, quite suddenly on the previous day, spring had come to India. It came with a balmy breath, sending a delicious stir to the buds on the hedges along the Mall, and a general sense of well-being and a quickening of the blood of man and beast. There is much to be said for a country that knows but two months of winter.

At eight o'clock we were waiting for the dawn and the Khan. A Kashmiri bag was at our feet, containing sandwiches and a thermos flask of coffee. At a quarter past eight the sky was rosy with the coming day, but there was no sign of the Khan.

"We have lost our grip on India." Evelyn spoke suddenly

and angrily. "In my mother's day, no Khan would have dared to keep a woman waiting."

We had been up till nearly three o'clock that morning. It was not surprising that Evelyn's temper was short.

"Why do you say that?" I asked. "Is it because no Indian ought to keep a woman waiting? Or because no man ought to?"

"I don't think any man has any business ever to keep a woman waiting——"

"I agree."

"Well, then——?"

"Of course, no Englishman has ever been known to do such a thing."

Evelyn's eyes fell. The night before, we had been kept waiting for nearly half an hour by our host, and no one had said anything, whatever may have been thought.

Into the silence of our rather unhappy reflections came Farman Shah to say that the Khan Sahib's car had arrived. The pale light of early morning made the trees in the compound seem enormous. The air was soft and warm. The Khan stood beside the car, large, genial, and friendly, and on the floor of the car there was a great hamper of fruit. With a swift movement I thrust the Kashmiri bag into Farman Shah's hands, and stepped in front of him so that he was hidden from the Khan. There was that about Farman Shah : one could trust him not to make tactless remarks.

As the car drove out of the compound, Evelyn whispered: "The cook will be very angry. They opened the kitchen early on purpose to get that lunch ready for us."

"Farman Shah will have the sense to eat it up himself and say nothing to anyone."

At night, on our return, there was no sign of the lunch.

"What did you do with it?" I asked Farman Shah.

"I gave the sandwiches to the sweeper," he replied grandly.

"Well, I am glad the sweeper had a decent meal for once." I spoke sharply. What was getting Farman Shah that he

scorned those clean sandwiches, when I knew full well that he had finished my breakfast for me every morning, except during the month of the Ramazan ?

There was silence while Farman Shah put coal on the fire. He rose to his feet, with a rustle of his baggy trousers, and faced me dramatically.

“ They were ham ! ”

“ Farman Shah ! Is that true ? I asked for egg sandwiches.”

“ Cook, he make ham ones.”

He watched me while the full horror of what might have happened burst over me. Supposing that we hadn't noticed that the Khan had brought his hamper of fruit, and we had taken our lunch as had been intended—my vision of the Khan munching sandwiches under a tree on the Malakand road faded into a nightmare of offering ham to a Mohammedan. Farman Shah waited until he was sure that the full drama of the situation was apparent to me. Then he went to the door, and said, with his hand on the curtain : “ No Mohammedan eat ham. Only Christians and sweepers eat ham. I give sandwiches to sweeper ; no harm done.”

As we drove down the Mall, the Khan said, over his shoulder :

“ I was a little late this morning. They kept me a long time at the fruit-markets. They had much to say, and at first I could not get the Kabuli grapes I wanted. But I expect you would be glad of the extra time. This is an early start for you, I know.”

I coughed, and Evelyn murmured : “ I apologise, humbly and entirely.”

“ I forgive you,” I returned, and added, more loudly : “ Yes, it is earlier than we usually get up. But I suppose you are always up long before this time ? ”

“ I rise every day before the sun, and spend the first hour in prayer. Before the dawn, I pray for my birth. Then, when day comes, I pray again—for my youth. Later, it is my maturity that I remember ; and, in the evening, my old

age; and, before I sleep, my death. Five times I pray each day, Miss Farmer. Do Christians pray so much?"

"Ah, look!" I cried. "The day has come."

The sun had risen over the hills, and the distant Khyber was bathed in a pale clear rose-coloured light.

We drove out of the cantonments, past the C.M.S. hospital and Guides' Chapel, and skirted the city. Near the Ashnagri Gate the car stopped. A servant was seen running towards the car across a piece of waste ground. The Khan called, "*Galdi! Galdi!*" and the man came up, panting, and handed a cartridge-belt and a revolver to the Khan.

As the car went on, I said: "You went unarmed through the Mohmand Border. Why do you bother to take that with you to-day?"

"It is necessary," he replied. He spoke quietly, but with such finality that Evelyn and I looked at each other.

"Do you think there is a chance we may be held up?"

"God forbid!" His voice was grave.

"I think a perfect host would arrange a hold-up for his guests."

"On the Frontier we do not jest about holds-up. Besides, what about the rescue?"

"We should leave that to you."

He laughed, uncertain what our chaffing meant.

The village beyond Nowshera has the worst reputation for criminality in the district. We drove through scattering pie dogs and children, disappointed that it should seem so peaceful. Its citizens looked tranquilly at our flying dust, and then returned to their normal occupations. The hills and the plain surround Peshawar, and in each direction both mountain and plain has a different aspect. Towards the Malakand the plain is fertile. There were rice-fields and sugar-cane, and the people had discarded the sombre clothes of the Frontier and went gaily in brilliant colours. On the other side of Mardan—where is the famous Guides Mess and an English church, strange to see in that lonely place—we came to what was once the bed of the River Indus. Many

hundreds of years ago it was all under water, and strange low hills rose out of the river-bed, and on these the Buddhists made their home. From these hills many of the Buddhist relics in the Peshawar Museum were excavated. The hills looked as if they had no backs, but were mere cardboard sets propped up from behind. There were vivid green patches in the plain where fields of wheat and barley had been planted. Along the roadside there were hand-machines for pressing the sugar out of the cane. The road was strewn with chaff from the cane.

Against a hillside that rose suddenly from the plain stood the small town of Takht-i-Bāhī. Behind the houses, on the bare slope of the hill, the round cakes of cow-dung were put to dry for fuel. The shops were raised above the level of the road, with open fronts. The colours of their wares were strong and crude : Russian teapots, blue and crimson ; *degchis* of brass and copper or polished aluminium ; fruit and vegetables of all sorts. The road was thronged with humanity, goats, donkeys, and dogs. They all, including the donkeys and the dogs, gazed at us with a mild surprise.

Along the road between the villages we passed trains of camels and buffaloes, carrying wood. We plunged through a river, and for a moment thought the water must be above the back axle ; and, speeding through a bare ravine with high sides, the Khan said : " A good place for your hold-up ! " Every mile was taking us nearer the mountains.

The Malakand was less stern and wild than the Khyber. Its slopes were gentler, its curves more gracious. The hills were blue instead of brown or rose—a blue that turned from indigo to lavender—and a low, dark-green bush grew over the range from foot to summit.

The railway-line, that had followed us casually across the plain, ended suddenly. A few miles further and we were at the foot of the hills. A camel came out of the mountain-side. Near a small wood of tamarisks, a shed sheltered some men who sat holding their rifles. Across the road, there was an iron gate, shut like a level crossing. " Malakand Pass " was

written on the gate. A man came out and addressed the Khan. The gate was opened, and we drove through.

The road turned and twisted, rising from the plain to the summit 3,000 feet up. It was a narrow road, and only a two-foot stone wall, loosely put together, divided us from the precipice. As the road turned, we looked back. In the abyss below lay the plain ; we might have been in an aeroplane. After the dust and overcrowding of Peshawar, the air was wonderfully clear and invigorating. At the summit of the pass, a fort stood silhouetted against the sky. To the left, 300 feet up, on a point of mountain, in a circle of cypress trees, was the house of the political agent.

Beyond the fort, the road turned an elbow, and with the drawing of a breath we had dropped from India into Italy. In a basin scooped out of the mountains there was an olive-grove, a field of stones where men sat hammering and breaking. On three sides the hills rose gently another three or four hundred feet. Looking from the silver olive-grove to the agent's house with its encircling cypresses, it was hard to believe that this was Asia.

The assistant political agent's house was above the road, to the right, beyond the field of stones. Below his compound there were mud walls and a line of go-downs. The assistant political agent was shy, and at first we thought that he spoke no English. The Khan treated him with kindly contempt. He went ahead in his car, and, when I suggested that he might be lonely, the Khan paid no attention.

Beyond the olive-grove, the road turned to the right, and went down the other side of the pass into the Swat Valley. Great grey boulders of rock covered the hillside ; this side, the descent was gentler, less perilous. We were in another country, and I was reminded of Les Baux in Provence. At the foot of the hills there were scattered hamlets, and the road was lined with acacia-trees. Temporarily we had left the stern frontier.

Legend lingers along the banks of the River Swat. The Buddhists occupied the valley long years ago, and, being

great traders, made it one of their chief highways into Central Asia. Some men say that Alexander came that way to conquer the Punjab. But, whether the Buddhists or Alexander made the road, the remains of Indo-Greek sculpture are to be found hidden in the hills.

In the valley, the Swat River ran a grey-green serene flow. We had seen it far away at Munda Post, and here it was the same river flowing through a richer land. The canal that came out at the other side of the Malakand was parallel to the river. There were rice-fields, vivid patches of green, and the air of the valley gave forth a quiet breath of serenity very soothing after the harsh wind of unrest that blows about Peshawar and the Khyber.

At Amandara there is a post, and a dam across the river. We stood and watched the weir while the Khan talked to the men in charge of the post. They showed us how they catch the fish in a net that opened like a fan, with weights all round its edge. A man stood up to his bare thighs in the water and threw the net out. It spread like a fan on the surface of the water, and then slowly sank. He waited, then drew the net up, closed ; and, when he laid it on the bank, we saw that there was inside one very small trout.

Six miles beyond Amandara, on the main Chitral road, is Chakdara Fort. One of the salt of the earth had passed that way twenty-four hours before. The car stopped under the archway of welcome, and we looked out at the flags fluttering on the towers of the fort. There was an intense silence round us as we watched the dust of the assistant political agent's car disappearing in a bend of the hills towards Chitral. The Khan had told him that we should go no further than Amandara, but he must have misheard the Khan's remark.

" Good God, what a funny man he is ! " the Khan said, in such a tone that made it seem much worse than if he had called him a damned fool and been done with it. But he was not such a funny man, after all, for I had not had time to persuade the Khan that we should prefer to continue the

journey to Chitral when his car reappeared in another cloud of dust.

On the road between Chakdara and the pass we came upon a train of those strange people from the Pamirs, on their way to trade with India. They walked beside their camels, fierce-looking men dressed in furs, with flat, Chinese faces and curious head-dresses. As we passed I noticed that one was eating something. He held a piece of doughy substance in his hand, and his jaw worked. It was more than I could bear, and I said, piteously : " Khan Sahib, I am so hungry."

The car left the main road, and drove down a track to a rocky promontory. Below us the canal ran into an opening in the mountain-side. We sat on the hard ground, and ate Kabuli grapes and oranges and the small sweet bananas that are entirely different from the coarse, soapy fruit of the West. I was hungry, and I enjoyed the fruit, and as I ate I looked about me, and the scene was one of peace and the loveliness of the sun shining on grey rock and grey, quiet water. Once I thought the Khan looked at me disapprovingly.

" Khan Sahib," I said, " do you think that truth and beauty are one and the same ? "

He looked puzzled.

" Or shall I put it another way ? Do you think it matters if you worship beauty more than truth ? "

" You should worship the One True God."

" Are all Muslims puritans ? "

" What is a puritan ? "

" A puritan is one who believes that beauty is a graven image."

The Khan chuckled. " I will tell you a story about graven images. In the year 1026, the conqueror Mahmud of Ghazni led his triumphal army to attack the great Hindu temple of Somnath, the holy place of Siva. For three days the battle raged round the walls. Then, on the third day, Mahmud called upon the God of Battles to come to his help, and,

with a cry of '*Allahu Akbar*,' he led the assault, and broke the enemy's lines, and forced his way into the shrine, and never stopped till he had come before the image itself.

" 'Hack the cursed thing in bits,' he cried. Then the priests came and knelt down before him, and begged Mahmud : They would give him all the treasures of the temple—the gold and silver and jewels—if he would only spare the image. His soldiers were ready to listen to the priests, but he was furious.

" 'On the Day of the Resurrection, let it be said, "Where is that Mahmud who broke the greatest of heathen images?" and not "Where is that Mahmud who sold it to the heathen for gold?"' And with that he broke the image, and out of the hole there poured diamonds and pearls and rubies and gold—a secret store that the Brahmins were keeping for themselves ! "

The Khan laughed aloud. Like all good Muslims, he had been brought up to enjoy this story. It had been to him what Alfred's cakes or the Bruce's spider had meant to my childhood. After a moment, I said : "That was history, Khan Sahib, and, as such, is probably untrue."

"But that would not trouble you so long as it was beautiful."

Evelyn and Clare and the assistant political agent clambered down the steep path to the canal. The water was low, and they began to pick their way from stone to stone up to the mouth of the tunnel. A small point of light like an electric globe was in the centre of the dark tunnel. It was light from the valley at the other side of the Malakand Pass three and a half miles away.

The Khan and I stood looking across the valley to the hills on the other side. At my feet the ground was littered with orange-peel and banana-skins. In vain I looked for a place to hide them. The bare ground was as hard as brick, and I could not throw them into the canal, nor into the

clear waters of the river. Equally, I could not take them back into the car.

"How revolting!" I said. "I have brought all the vulgarity of the West to this lovely unspoilt valley!"

I spoke petulantly. I had not realised that a meal of fruit could be so entirely and uncomfortably satisfying.

The Khan laughed. "Never mind. Your cousin did good justice to the oranges, too." This was unfair to Evelyn, but I let it pass.

Presently the Khan began to grow restive. "What is the matter? Is there any hurry?"

"We have still some things to see, and we have to be back in Peshawar by dark."

"Well, tell them to hurry up."

"You do it," he said. "Please, Miss Sahib."

I moved impatiently. "I shall do nothing of the sort. This is your show."

He laughed, and called: "Miss Farmer tells me to say, 'Hurry up.'"

They came back, laughing. As we got back into the car, I was thinking that the man who could round up the Red-Shirt movement was willing to wait all the day upon the idle pleasure of two insignificant girls.

The jolting of the car improved neither my thoughts nor my digestion, and it was somewhat gloomily that I descended at the assistant political agent's bungalow and climbed the steep path leading to his compound.

On the hard ground of the compound a servant stood with a falcon on his wrist. It was a beautiful bird which held its head up with an air of savage pride. "Ah," said the Khan. "Miss Farmer shall be photographed with the bird on her wrist!" I looked from the contemptuous yellow eye of the bird to my own bare wrists, for I had lost my gloves. The Khan had a way of talking of "brave British women," and I had no wish to fall short of his estimation. Mercifully, Evelyn had no more films left, so, with thanksgiving in my heart, I followed the others up to the verandah

of the bungalow, where there was a table spread with a feast. The Khan had not, then, believed me when I said that Christians did not live to eat.

On a side table there was a basin of steaming hot water, a cake of carbolic soap, and a clean towel. I was sorry for the Khan, who came last. But, if he objected to the dust from Christian hands, he was too polite to say so.

On the table, in front of each chair, there were several hard-boiled eggs, a plate of cakes and sweet biscuits, and a chicken, roasted whole, and in some curious way flattened as if it had been put through the mangle. We sat down, and large bath-towels were handed round for us to put across our knees. They brought plates of a grey flat-looking pastry—one for each guest. I averted my eyes quickly. At the best of times pastry is terrible, but at that moment—I was confronted by a Scylla and Charybdis of defeat—whether to eat or not ; either way lay disgrace. I chose the least humiliating to myself. Selfish, no doubt, but in these moments one is not altruistic. The hot, strong tea was comforting, and, by playing with the sweet biscuits, I hoped to appear less ungracious.

The guests ate without knives and forks, but, since they washed before and after, it was not unclean. Evelyn and Clare made a brave work over the chicken and the pastry. The Khan looked at me very sternly.

“Miss Farmer, there are eggs *in shells* for those who wish to be sure that their food has not been touched by human hands.”

I deserved it. I had failed, in front of his friend. He had boasted, saying : “She does not love the cantonments ; she loves India,” and now this had happened.

I murmured feebly : “It is the bananas.” But he did not believe me. The chicken and my share of the pastry were given to the chauffeur, proving it to be indeed an ill wind, etc. ; but it was long before the Khan forgave me.

After another public washing, we went with the assistant political agent to receive tight bouquets of jonquils that

gave forth a faint, despairing breath of perfume, as if to assert that they meant, at all costs, to die gallantly. We said good-bye to the assistant political agent, and began the descent of the pass, going slowly that we might watch at every fresh turn of the road the lovely curves of the opposite mountain just across the canal valley.

At Mardan the car turned sharply to the right and sped across the plain towards Charsadda. We drove slowly through the town. There were small isolated groups of men talking outside the houses. The home of villainy had a singularly quiet air. It reminded me of a small provincial French town on a hot, dusty summer's evening. It was just such a town, on a smaller scale, as Madame Bovary lived in, complaining the while of its dullness. The Khan was recognised, and there were greetings and shouts. It was all as decorous and dull as Scotland on a Sunday.

"It wasn't as quiet as this when you were here, was it?"

The Khan chuckled. "Are you disappointed? What did you expect? All the same, it is very dangerous town, this."

"What have you done with the ringleader?"

"He is in jail. But not here, of course."

"How disappointing! We should have liked to see him peering at you anxiously through the bars of the prison."

The Kabul River flows near Charsadda, and beyond the town, over the first bridge, we came to familiar ground as the car joined the road from Shabkadr.

"And so the Khan never needed his gun, after all," Evelyn said, in the tone in which one usually remarks: "There! I needn't have brought my umbrella; it turned out quite fine in the end."

CHAPTER VII

THE KOHAT PASS

THE SCIENTIFICALLY MINDED deride the philosophers, saying that their contribution to life is worthless, since they never settle the question, "Am I, or do I merely think I am?" Yet it is not really a case that the touch of cold philosophy puts all charms to flight; moreover, there is, of course, no shadow of doubt that the Kohat Pass was. It is only that I cannot be certain that had I seen it on any day other than the particular one chosen by the Khan, I might have been less aware that it was.

We were making quite a family affair of the outing. Behind the Khan's Dodge, the Morris of the cousins went along blithely chug-chugging. The Khan had made a great point that the cousins should accompany us. Since, in his eyes, the whole object of the expedition was to visit the rifle-factory in the pass, he wanted to insure that one member of the party would show an intelligent interest, and if a colonel could not look animated over a rifle then, indeed, we might sing the death-day of empire.

It was not that I had fallen from grace in the eyes of the Khan. He had, however, by now come to the sad conclusion that I was not interested in the death-day of empires, and that if he spoke of bandits' dens I was sure to brood on fair Pastorella chained within, and that the silver bow of Hero's tears or the swoon of Imogen meant more to me than a rifle factory. As a companion to the Malakand or the Mohmand Border I had been passable in his eyes, since, when it came to the question of a dam, there was Evelyn willing to forget for a moment her food and her photography

and to step forward with a gaudy show of interest. The Khan's observant eyes had noted this, of course, and I had been written down as one who sighed for an age sheltered from annoy and the busy voice of common sense, and that obstinately I set my face against knowing how the moon changed.

Beyond the city the road ran straight across bare, strange country, rising imperceptibly towards the hills. Away over to the right, the distant Khyber mountains looked more than ever like purple dragon-teeth cut out of cardboard against an intensely blue sky. Between us and the Khyber stretched the Khajuri Plain, a menacing no man's land, yesterday in the hands of the Afridis, to-day annexed by Government. A long tongue of land thrust itself into British India over the ridge of mountains from the Khyber, down the Kohat Pass, to the plain. Over the other side of the hills was again British territory, where Kohat lay in the sunshine of a green plain. But the bare tongue of mountain is Afridi, and belonging to the Adam-Khels, whose name, with its gentle, almost urban flavour, quite belies the nature of this particular tribe.

A large white notice-board marked the end of British rule. The Khan's car waited for the cousins to overtake us. "This time we will send them on in front," the Khan said, smiling. "Then we shall know if they break down."

"You mean, it would be a pity if they broke down in the pass?"

"No; in that sense, it would not matter to-day."

"Where is your revolver?"

"I haven't brought it."

"But you had it when we went to the Malakand, and to-day we go right into tribal territory in the pass, where not so very long ago an Englishwoman was taken."

"Miss Farmer, you will be safer in the Kohat Pass than you have been since reaching India. The Afridis are responsible to Government for your safety. Besides," he added shrewdly, "supposing they do forget their manners, what

good would my revolver be? Every Afridi carries a rifle, and a revolver has no chance against a rifle. So if they hold the car up, my revolver is stolen, and I can protect you no better than with it."

This was, of course, logical, and typical of the Khan, who had no patience with a picturesque pandering to the imagination. Unlike Farman Shah, he had no urge to dramatise his moments, possibly because his life had been too full of real moments, at Charsadda, Shabkadr, or even in the city, when the Afridis, like the proverbial wolf, came prowling down upon the fields just beyond the city gates.

A narrow slip of valley ran up between the mountains. Before the road began the sharp ascent, there was a long, low line of what appeared to be go-downs. The Malik and his friends were waiting to receive his guests. The car stopped; there were introductions, compliments were exchanged, and the Khan named the hour of our return.

Beyond the village, there were several sanctuaries—small enclosures built round the grave of some martyr who had been murdered in the pass in one of the many inter-tribal skirmishes. Into these sanctuaries the people were at liberty to put any valuable : a rifle, a rug, some china-ware—any object that they wanted to treasure. For six months no one might touch it ; it would be as safe as if it were in a strong-room. They are a strange tribe, who may think nothing of murdering you in your bed, but who will refrain from robbing an open, unguarded sanctuary.

At the summit of the pass there was a post, and, leaving the car, we climbed the stony crag behind. To the left, spread out far below, like a map, was the Afridi country : golden-brown hills, a golden-brown valley, villages with mud walls and watch-towers ; small fields lying like handkerchiefs in the sunshine ; black dots, like flies, that were processions of villagers walking across the valley. I had seen wilder, grander country, lovelier valleys : the Khyber had a weirder fascination, the Malakand was more magnificent, and the Swat Valley, with its silver water and acacia-trees, was fairer

far. Yet there was that about this golden-brown world, the formation of the hills, the way the valley ran up like a broad tongue between the ranges, that made me wish that I had been an Adam-Khel to possess this pass. For, as has been said of a very different range of mountains, these hills know how to make the best of themselves.

To the right, the road dropped steeply down the other side of the pass, winding down in the Kohat Valley. Across the strip of road below us, the mountain-side seemed to fall suddenly down about 2,000 feet to the valley that stretched like a green billiard-cloth, spreading and widening into the distance where the hills turned away to the left and the right. A grey smudge in the centre was the smoke rising from Kohat.

As I stood silent, on my stony peak above the post, I thought of many things. But, principally, I thought that if any nation or people could bring to the Afridis not a sword but peace, then no longer should we be cooped up behind the barbed wire of cantonments ; that there would be an end of inanity and futility and petty jealousy and anger, for the lion would lie down with the lamb, and the ape and the peacock would together scale the bare hillsides. Then I remembered that if this delectable golden-brown world became the playground for all men, the German would come and open a beer-garden ; the Swiss would turn the post into an hotel ; an American cocktail-bar would stand beside me on my crag ; and for the English there would be a tea-room, with watercress and thick bread and butter. At every turn of the road a petrol-pump would rear its monstrous head into the clear air, and the side of the road would furnish space for advertisements of motor-spirit. For even as I brought peace to the Adam-Khels, so surely would the march of vulgarity begin.

The others were waiting for me by the cars. As I stepped warily down on to the road off the loose stones of the hillside, my cousin must have caught a reflection of my mood, for she asked : " Have you lost your glare-glasses ? " And the Khan said drily : " I hope it is beautiful enough to satisfy you to-day, Miss Farmer."

Outside the go-downs at the beginning of the pass the whole tribe seemed to have collected. A low archway led into a small mud-walled courtyard. Several donkeys were asleep on heaps of straw. Under a thatched shed, two odd-looking wheels were at work boring holes in half-made rifles.

To one who is convinced, not so much by instinct as by reason, of the necessity of peace, a visit to an armament-factory must spell a sense of cold, unhappy despair. No one, however firm a pacifist, could take the factory in the Kohat Pass, famous as it may be, for anything other than a caricature, even though he may be told that it engages in a large and flourishing trade, turning out immense quantities, after a German pattern, which are sold at an absurdly low figure to the neighbouring tribes, to be used indiscriminately against each other or the Feringhis.

Having satisfied our curiosity as to the donkeys and the wheels, the Malik led us into another courtyard, through a narrow passage, with a low archway at either end, with doors whose strength and thickness suggested that the factory was alive to the danger of attack. One side was roofed over, and here were the wheels and benches and instruments for the making of the rifles. Leaving my cousin to show the right spirit over the rifles, I went and watched the crowd of Afridis who had followed us. They kept a distance from the Malik's guests, who remained in the shade under the sheds. The centre of the courtyard was a seething mass of them, gazing open-mouthed, with the most unblushing curiosity, at the Feringhis. They were fine-looking men, each with his rifle over his shoulder, for an Afridi carries a rifle as an Englishman his pocket-handkerchief.

Beyond the courtyard there was a third, even larger, where the Malik's house stood. On the verandah stood a table covered with a flowered red bedspread, and on the table a feast prepared for the Malik's guests. My cousin, I regret to say, was so overwhelmed by the Malik's hospitality that she broke the Third Commandment. Recovering herself quickly, however, she took the seat of honour behind the table, facing

the courtyard. Her husband sat beside her. Suspended by their legs from two nails above my cousins' heads hung four dead birds. They were some delicacy from the pass, and were later presented, tied on to a long thin stick. But during the feast they remained suspended like nimbuses above the cousins' heads.

The Malik's charpoy (string bedstead) had been drawn up in front of one side of the table, and here Evelyn, the Khan, and I seated ourselves. The front of the table and fourth side had been left open, to facilitate waiting, and in order that the tribe might have the pleasure of watching every mouthful that the guests consumed.

Strong tea was served in Russian teapots ; the cups were cracked, and one wondered how, when, or where they had been washed. But I was thirsty, and somehow, at that moment, in that setting, it mattered little whether they had ever been washed at all. Milk came hot and foaming in a jug, obviously boiled for our special benefit. But, before my hand could stretch out, my cousin's warning cough arrested it. I sighed, and said, "No, thank you." Whereat the Khan looked annoyed, because he knew as well as I did that boiled milk harmed no one.

They brought strange flat cakes, tasting of the fuel that had cooked them—a mixture of charcoal and cow-dung—and plates of thin, crisp biscuits covered with highly coloured sugar-icing. The biscuits were delicious, and I contrived to eat up a whole plateful, which I trust was to the satisfaction of the gaping crowd, who watched every crumb that went down our throats with the intensity of hungry dogs.

As the cars drove away, after the final good-byes had been said to the Malik, the Khan leaned over the back of the front seat, and said : "I hope you are satisfied now ?"

"I shall be satisfied when I drive through the gateways into Kabul."

The Khan chuckled. "Will nothing else satisfy you—not even if I say I will take you to Razmuk ?"

"I would rather you took me to Kabul. If I went dressed

as a Pathan, I could go and come as your son, and no one would be the wiser."

"You could go to Razmuk and back as my son. We could be there and back in a day," the Khan said cautiously.

I sighed, and the Khan laughed. "'A dog at the footsteps is worth more than a friend at the distance.' Do you know what that means?"

"It means that I must have contentment still."

"It also means that it must be as your cousin says."

I looked as demure and maidenly as I could, and he added magnanimously: "But we shall talk of all this later."

The Khan's Hindu friend was waiting to join us at tea in the café next door. The proprietor's son stood in the doorway and greeted the Khan. His hair was carefully brushed back and oiled, and he wore immaculately cut grey flannels. A short cut from my room to my cousin's took me across his compound. I had passed him at least three times every day since my arrival. Farman Shah had likewise told me his family history, and no doubt mine had been related to him by way of Farman Shah and his bearer. If I had not imagined that I should ever have tea in his café, no doubt he had equally never looked at me in the light of a prospective client.

A British Tommy and a young lady were sitting at a table in one corner, drinking tea and making artless love. The proprietor's son had arranged screens whereby the Khan's party were sheltered from the gaze of the vulgar.

I had a great respect for the Khan's Hindu friend. Not only had he an extraordinary command of the English language, both grammatical and colloquial, but he had also the most perfect taste in clothes. He had a fancy for grey, and would appear in a symphony of dove or stone that not only included suit and tie, but shirt and collar as well. He held advanced views upon woman's education; his poise was unshakable, and in his lighter moments he went to the cinema, or directed his *mali* in the growing of roses. He was, in fact, a man of exceptionally good taste all round, which did not prevent his having his weaknesses, and one

was a somewhat cynical attitude to life and people, myself included. He began by imagining that I was writing a political history of the North-West Frontier Province. In those days, the Khan may fondly have hoped that. When I undeceived him, for a moment he looked disappointed, but, rallying quickly, he said :

“ Then you are writing a counterblast to *Mother India* ? ”

“ Dear me, no ! I shouldn’t presume to do that.”

“ It has been done already, you know.”

“ Has it ? ”

“ Yes. *Father India*, it is called. Don’t you think that is a good counterblast ? ”

“ No,” I replied, idly eating salted almonds from the silver tray in front of my plate. “ If I were going to write a counterblast, I should call it ‘ Spinster England.’ ”

He laughed. Then, after a moment, he continued : “ I am no longer a young man. I admit that I have never lived in the far south. But, in all my life, I have never seen——” He was launched.

I allowed him to talk, while I ate almonds, and regretted my idle and rather foolish words. At length I interposed : “ It is, after all, always a matter of taste.”

“ Of taste, Miss Farmer ? ”

“ Yes. You are a man, I am sure, to whom good taste means a lot.”

In his mind’s eye he saw his beds of crimson roses, and the *almira* where he kept his best grey suits. “ What has good taste to do with it ? ”

“ Everything. My own words to you, for instance, were in very doubtful taste.”

He was thoughtful during the eating of the savoury, and when I rose, at my hostess’s command, I said : “ I think you are one who acts up to that admirable maxim : ‘ Never regret, and never apologise,’ and, since I have done both, you are rather shocked.”

He followed me to the dining-room door, laughing and protesting ; but I think after that he was suspicious of me as

either one whose words meant more than they seemed, or else one who suffered unduly from levity.

"And so," said the Hindu friend over his second cup of tea, "you are leaving us to-morrow?"

"But only for a short time. I am soon returning to the Frontier."

"Miss Farmer has given her loyalty to the north. She is of the mountains, like ourselves." The Khan spoke sententiously.

"You are not afraid that your loyalty may be shaken?"

I laughed. "The thought of leaving the Frontier makes me homesick already." As I looked down into my cup, I saw not the dark, strong Indian tea, but the tranquil waters of the Kabul River, and the white embroidered *numdah* at my feet gleamed palely in the dusk, reminding me of the silver shimmer of the Swat as it flowed under the dam at Munda Post. The distempered walls of the café seemed to melt into thin air, and, beyond the screens, I saw the proud snow-capped mountains of the Khyber rearing their heads. I remembered a silver olive-grove lying in a cup at the summit of the Malakand Pass. I felt again the clear air touching my face as I stood looking at the delectable mountains of the Adam-Khel family. I heard the clamour of many voices, and saw the surging crowds in the Street of the Story-Tellers. And always the beckoning road led through the passes of the Hindu Kush towards Kabul.

"Besides," I added with smug complacency, "what has the south to offer in comparison?"

"Never fear," said the Khan, helping himself to a large slice of pink-and-white-iced cake. "Miss Farmer will come back to the Frontier."

"Yes, she will come back." The rather full lips of the Hindu friend curled, and he seemed to be smiling secretly. "It is only that I am not fully convinced that the south has no message for her."

"She will be very comfortable in Delhi," the Khan replied. "It is a good hotel, and there is much to see."

The curling smile of the Hindu friend broadened, and with one manicured finger he touched the folds of his pale pink puggari. "There are more things than the Kutb Minar," he murmured.

Neither the Khan nor I replied. The Khan was thinking of the accumulation of work that he would find at his office on the morrow ; and in imagination I was following a lone trail through the stark hills beyond Jellalabad.

PART II
OLD WINE AND NEW BOTTLES

CHAPTER I

DELHI, OLD AND NEW

IT IS A FAR CRY from Delhi to Peshawar, but Farman Shah, rattling on the hard seats of the servants' carriage, made it without complaint. And if the minarets of the Jama Masjid reminded him that "There is no God but God ! Mohammed is the Prophet of God," Shah Jahan's words, that are carved on the cornices of the Hall of Special Audience in the fort, found an echo in his heart : " If there be a paradise on earth, it is this, it is this."

Delhi was built for kings, and planned with a glorious recklessness and splendid waste that is a fitting symbol for that teeming land. It cries out for kings to ride once more, and the sight of Maharajas in Rolls-Royce motor-cars is hardly satisfying. It is a city full of gardens and spacious ways ; town and country intermingle, and it is hard to tell where one begins and the other ends. The everlasting plain stretches out its arms all round Delhi, a battleground since the days when the gods condescended to sport with the daughters of men and history was in the mist. The plain has seen a succession of conquerors who took Delhi with the sword, destroyed the city they found, and built another for their own aggrandisement. Seven cities rose to fame, made history, and then crumbled into ruins, leaving only a memorial of stones for the pious hands of archæologists. The plain is scarred and haunted by battles and scattered with the dust of these old cities, and now, by a strange accident or a stranger design of fate, an eighth Delhi, blatant with the clamour of democracy, has risen phoenix-wise from the ashes of dead empires. For there is a saying that he who

builds a city on the plain of Delhi shall lose an empire. A pretty phrase it is, no doubt, and one that is on the same level of superstition as that which tells that, while the Attock Bridge stands, the British will hold India, or that the falling of the Coliseum means the ultimate fall of the world.

It was Farman Shah who found what he called the *phitton gharry*. But "phæton" was too grand a name for the dirty old open carriage drawn by two incredibly thin horses. I felt that we shamed the hotel by our departure, nor did the angular figure of Farman Shah, perched high up on the box beside the driver, really add tone to the affair. He was wearing his best clothes, a new grey puggari, and an alpaca coat to match, and I had not the heart to point out that the dangling shirt, also new and clean, marred his beauty.

The *phitton gharry* went by way of the Kashmiri Gate, where, near by, Nicholson was murdered in 1857. Shah Jahan's beautiful red city wall is marked and broken with the storming of that unhappy year.

The *gharry* stopped by the Lahore Gate of the fort. A guide immediately stepped forward and said briskly: "Good morning, ladies. You want to visit the fort?"

At that moment, and thus challenged by the guide, I felt that the last thing I wanted was to visit the fort. The name had an uncompromisingly military sound, and at the best of times I am not over-fond of big guns. All that was visible was a stretch of red sandstone wall, a high gateway with exquisitely carved flowers, and groups of British soldiers bustling about in topis.

"Shah Jahan built the fort," the guide told me.

"I know," I replied coldly.

"He was a master architect."

"I know"—still more coldly.

"You need guide, ladies; you see nothing without guide to tell you."

We passed through the gateway, followed by the mutterings of the guide. I had a feeling that Farman Shah would have enjoyed his ministrations, but it was undermining to

discipline to pander to his every wish. We walked down a street with open stalls that sold tawdry rubbish, and reminded me of the shops that stand on a level with the stones underneath the front at Brighton. It was even worse than big guns. Two Tommies, bent on important business for the Empire, hurried down the street and turned to enter an office on the left. A lanky Hindu youth was gazing spell-bound at Farman Shah. I do not know whether it was the shirt, or the leather case of my camera that hung from Farman Shah's hand, that fascinated him. He was between the office and the Tommies. It would have been far easier to have passed behind him into the office, but that would have made the business less important. The foremost Tommy put out a large red hand and shoved the lanky youth roughly backwards, until there was a clear space for the clattering feet. The youth apparently bore them no malice ; he continued to gaze open-mouthed at Farman Shah. Pacifists spend a greater part of their lives seeing red, as it is called, than other people. Almost every street corner, and nearly every conversation other than meteorological discussion, gives them some cause which makes them ache to bang their neighbour over the head with an umbrella. When the dust at my feet had ceased to reflect the colour of the sandstone walls, I came to the conclusion that the reason of my agitation had been that deep down in the inmost recesses, beyond hypocrisy, of my heart, I looked upon myself as being as much the superior of the Tommies as they did of the lanky youth, and that if I could control my impulse, why not they ? It was a humiliating reflection.

Across a square at the end of the street an archway led to the Imperial Drum House. Beyond that there was a green stretch of lawn sheltered by two high avenues of trees. A cream-coloured bullock was drawing a mowing-machine. At the end of the lawn stood the Diwan-i-am, a fine red sandstone pavilion. Inside was the famous white marble recess, the Nashiman-i-zill-ilahi.

“ That means the Seat of the Shadow of God, Miss
Hr

Sahib," Farman Shah said piously, and at his quiet words the red grit of the sandstone fell from my eyes and I was able to look at the cool white marble inlaid with a pale shadow of what had once been brilliant semi-precious stones.

A narrow passage and some broken steps led to the back entrance of the pavilion. The passage was dark, and it was necessary to walk with care down the steps, and the passing from the sombre passage into the brilliant sunshine was dazzling to the eyes, for without warning we had emerged into paradise.

There were green lawns, cypress-trees, masses of English summer flowers mingling in the beds beside tropical flowering shrubs. Small bright birds flitted from flower to flower, hoopoes raised their golden crests from the grass at our feet, and grey squirrels ran hurriedly about the trees. Under a clear blue sky, in dazzling sunshine, stood white marble pavilions, and a marble mosque with delicate minarets and gilded domes, and over all there brooded an immense quiet and peace. The "stream of paradise" in its white marble had once flowed down the centre of the pavilions, and there were fountains springing out of carved lotus-flowers, and the walls were studded with jewels and patines of bright gold. Now, since the rape of Persia and Hindustan, the jewels are gone and the gold has been scraped off the walls; the hand of Government has checked the flowing fountains, and the stream has run dry since the last titular King of Delhi went the way of all flesh in 1857. But it is better so. The days of great monarchs are no more, and only the peace and the intense white radiance of the marble remain as undying memorials to the genius of Shah Jahan. For time has tenderly touched his white pavilions, and centuries of sunshine have breathed into them a lovely living warmth, until the carved marble has become like old lace, more delicate and beautiful than ivory.

Farman Shah stood on the raised platform of the Diwan-i-Khas and looked at its pillars inlaid with a serpentine of mosaic flowers, agate and porphyry and blue lapis lazuli.

In letters of gold on the cornices at either end he read Shah Jahan's famous inscription.

"Is it true, do you think, Farman Shah?"

"Yes, Miss Sahib. It was true in Moghul days. They are saying King Jahan was a great king. He was a Mohammedan," he added fervently.

Leaving the glory of kings, we emerged into the dust of Old Delhi, and drove in the *phitton* down the Chandni Chauk, the main street of the bazaar. It was a great contrast from Peshawar City, where the men were wild and dangerous but splendidly virile. The Hindus in the Chandni Chauk had a gentle air of abstraction, as if their real interests lay not in the everyday affairs of the street. The colours were vivid, both of the shops and the dresses. Brahmin bulls wandered at their own sweet will along the pavements, picking foodstuffs off the stalls, and camels ambled by, drawing strange, high carts from the villages out in the plain. I was in search of silver bracelets with snakes' heads for a little child, and I had been told that every other shop in the Chandni Chauk was a silversmith's. In the old days, when British women wore frizzed fringes and high neckbands and clanking jewellery, and had a natural dignity and reticence that the Indian admired and respected, one bought silver snakes'-head bracelets in Delhi. But the days of selling fans at a penny in the Strand are no more. Another generation has sprung up that goes bare-legged and bare-armed, and craves neither dignity nor respect, and the silver shops no longer jostle one another in the Chandni Chauk.

Farman Shah understood what I wanted, and so did the driver of the *phitton*. There was a great deal of discussion, and shopkeepers came out and offered us their wares—embroidered slippers, velvet caps for little boys, anything except bracelets. At length, at the far end of the Chandni Chauk, where it converged with a narrow road at right-angles, the *phitton*-driver found a small open booth with a row of coarsely worked silver anklets laid out on a strip of paper.

A young boy lolled against the wooden side of the booth, chewing betel-nut and gazing with fixed, incurious eyes at the streams of passers-by. An old man in a white muslin robe sat cross-legged on the floor at the opposite corner. He had silver hair, which showed under the small plum-coloured velvet cap, in shape like the Gandhi caps, that he wore pushed back of his head. His lips were stained with *pan* and eyes were circled with black paint. He neither moved nor spoke when Farman Shah leapt off the driver's seat and accosted him in a flow of Hindustani.

The lolling youth came forward, and several friends from neighbouring shops hurried up to join in the discussion. Carefully picking my way, I stepped from the *phitton* on to the booth. Farman Shah tried to persuade me that large heavy anklets were equally suitable to the wrists of a child of four. When I remained unconvinced, he turned again to the youth, and another conversation followed.

"The boy he knows nothing," Farman Shah said at last. "I say he make little bracelets, but he say not his shop ; old man's shop."

Simultaneously the gaze of the whole party turned accusingly upon the old man. The lolling boy and Farman Shah addressed him briskly. The old man in the muslin robe continued to sit motionless, with crossed legs. He was seeing without sight, beyond the mists of pleasure and pain, the Sun-coloured Being who is beyond the darkness.

"Don't," I said. "Can't you see he is about business much more important than silver bracelets? Leave him alone."

"Hand-making gods !" muttered Farman Shah scornfully.

"Whether they are hand-made or not, I'm going."

The smell of the street was overpowering—a violent blend of garbage, rancid *ghi* and sacred cows. A beggar with no arms was trying to attract our attention. The *phitton*-driver agreed that it was not the moment for loitering. He jumped on to the box and began to whip up the horses. Farman Shah

reluctantly followed. He would have liked to stay longer to bait the old man about his hand-made god. "Old Delhi very dirty," he said smugly over his shoulder, as the smell followed us down the narrow, crowded street. Being unable to answer with truth, "I like dirt," I was silent.

That evening, by way of the city of Feroz Shah, where the column of Asoka stands among warm brown ruins covered with creeper and banks of purple bougainvillæa, the road led past the modern palaces of princes, under the triumphal arch, up the mile and a half of the secretariat buildings and the Viceroy's house. No one, not even Farman Shah, could complain that New Delhi was dirty. Nor does it matter, in a country larger than Europe, that it should cover more than five miles of ground. Nor does it seem extravagant, in a land where one man alone possesses eight million in gold ; besides, it was planned in the days before the world collapsed economically. But what does matter so deeply that one can hardly bear to remember it is that, with all the space and time, money and talent, that were given to it, so much beauty has been marred by isolated examples of bad taste.

One of the loveliest memorials in the world stands in the centre, in front of the Viceroy's house, the gift of a prince. It is a tall, slender column of white marble on a sandstone base, carved in lotus-flowers, with an iron star of India as its summit, and round the base are carved Lord Irwin's parting words to India—lovely words, worthy to stand anywhere. One is apt to feel the sting of unshed tears at the beauty as it is surveyed from the back, and, as one goes round to the front of the column, the same tears are quite certain to drip with rage. For there stands a full-length statue of another viceroy, made out of white sugar—or at least it looks like white sugar. In front of the Viceroy's house two more white sugar likenesses, of Their Majesties, offend the eye ; and at night Lutyens's lovely dome is lit with bright red electric lights, that shine forth like wicked eyes to affright the ghosts that haunt the plain in search of phantom armies and riderless horses. And between the triumphal arch and the Purana

Kila a modern stadium shouts the trumpet-blast of the twentieth century across the wrinkled yellow waste ; for only a few miles stretch between the first and the last city.

The Purana Kila was built on the site of the Indraprastha, where in the days before Troy the five Pandava princes built their city. From the ruined walls of the Purana Kila we saw the sun set behind New Delhi, and, as the sky darkened and the buildings slowly disappeared from sight, the lights began to twinkle along the roads, and from the Viceroy's house and the bungalows and houses of the princes.

A wild-looking man with the fur cap and straight back of the north climbed the broken stone steps and came and stood beside us, and gazed spellbound at the blaze of lights that circled the new city.

"Well, my friend," said one of our party, "you seem impressed by the view. It is very fine, isn't it? Do you admire New Delhi?"

The man straightened his back. "I am from Kabul. In Kabul we have much better electric light than this."

The laughter that greeted this in no way disturbed him. He continued to gaze across the plain towards the west.

"If you are from Kabul, what are you doing here?"

"I am a *mali*. My master comes often to Delhi, and when he comes he brings me with him."

"It is a long way to Kabul, and difficult to get there," I said.

The man turned his eyes slowly on me.

"Tell me," I asked, "what is Kabul really like when you do get there?"

The man looked at me silently. A vision of the Kabul that he knew was passing in his mind, but he was unable to communicate it to me. He struggled for a moment with his inarticulateness, then he gave up. "Kabul is my home," he said simply.

The following day was Friday, when the weekly service was held at the Jama Masjid. Shah Jahan's great mosque is

of red sandstone and white marble, and it stands on a rocky height overlooking the fort and the city. A long, wide flight of steps leads up to the three gateways. We sat in the Begum's Gallery, overlooking the stone-paved courtyard that was of a vastness that took one's breath away. We sat on rickety kitchen chairs in the high gallery, feeling slightly giddy, for not only would a false move have crashed us on to the stones below, but the mosque, with its domes of marble and its towering minarets, was of proportions so perfect, and withal of a beauty beyond compare that one wondered why the whole world did not rise in arms and declare its beauty to the high heavens. But perhaps it had done so, and only my ignorance had taught me to listen to a prating of a white Taj by moonlight.

Soon a vast multitude began to gather in the square. The stone floor of the court was paved in lines, and the crowd took their stand along these lines, after having first washed hands, feet, and face in the bathing-pool in the centre. Each man put his shoes in front of him, resting them on their sides, so that the soles might not, by their touch, defile the holy ground of the mosque. In front of the high central arch of the *masjid* there was a platform or pulpit, where three priests in dark green—the holy colour of the Muslims—with pale green puggaris, stood waiting for the moment to begin the service. High up in one of the minarets a muezzin was calling the people to prayer in the strange, high song of Islam. At the appointed moment the call ended, and the priests began to intone the service, repeating verses from the Koran.

The crowd stood still in straight lines, the lovely pale colours of the puggaris making the whole court appear to have been laid with a Persian carpet of a flower design. Then, at a signal, the multitude went down on its haunches, and the design of the carpet changed and darkened as the shoulders of tweed coats came to light and blended with rose- and gold-embroidered backs. Then, at a further sign from the priests, simultaneously the crowd bent forward till their

heads touched the ground in front, and hundreds and thousands of posteriors came to view. It was like looking down upon a patchwork quilt when white silk has been the material mainly used. A faint, wanton breeze lifted and stirred the shirt-tails that hung over the trousers, swelling them here and there like a quilt that has been carefully stuffed. Looking down at the still pattern of white, grey, and beige, it was hard to realise that it was a concourse of men at prayer. Suddenly, with one movement, they rose to their feet, and again the courtyard was covered with a Persian flowered carpet. In those twenty minutes of service something of the force of Islam rose into the perilous eminence of the Begum's Gallery ; a sense of that brotherhood that transcends race, colour, or class, whercin, before the *masjid*, all men are equal, and the Nizam of Hyderabad himself, when he comes, has to take his place beside the lowest of the low.

We made our escape before the crowd had time to surge through the gateways. We were only just in time, for as we reached the last steps of the stairs they came hot on our heels, and began to press round the car. One especially came pushing his way, grinning and trying to get his head inside the car window.

"Really," said my hostess, "these people are getting impossible. Look at that ruffian ! What does he want, trying to push his way into the car ? " And she told him sharply to go away.

I turned my eyes from the multitude on the steps to see what manner of man was trying to force himself upon us. I saw a wild creature with a fur cap beaming upon me. It was the *mali* from Kabul.

"Oh ! please don't. He means no harm. He only thought I wasn't going to recognise him again. He's a friend of mine." And I called, "Salaam, *mali*." He saluted and called back a gay "Salaam, Miss Sahib," and, stepping back, melted into the crowd.

My hostess only said : "What odd friends you have," but I think she was regretting her invitation to luncheon. I,

however, was thinking that at least I would have one friend in Kabul, and it was Clare who told the story of our meeting. At the end of it the hostess was none the wiser, and to this day she probably thinks of me as the mad woman who rejoiced over one *mali* in Kabul.

CHAPTER II

THE PLAIN

THE KUTB MINAR towers upwards of 238 feet, a defiant assertion of the power of Islam. It was built by one Kutb-ad-Din, who, having once been a slave, was anxious to proclaim to all the world that he had become Muslim conqueror of Delhi. In the shadow of this great column of red sandstone stands the pillar of Raja Dhava, a slender shaft of wrought-iron, pointing a modest twenty-three feet into the radiant air. There was an old belief that, while the iron pillar stood, Hindu rule should survive in Delhi. Kutb-ad-Din, however, when he was building his challenge to the world, can have had little faith in tradition, since he allowed the Hindu column to remain in his own mosque. The two rival pillars have stood untouched by time or decay, while both the Hindu and the Muslim rulers of Delhi have been superseded by yet a third power, that owes conscious allegiance neither to Brahma nor to the Prophet.

Tradition still lingers among the ruined walls and crumbling stones of the old Lal Kot, the Red Fort that Kutb-ad-Din converted into his mosque, using the columns of twenty-seven Hindu, Jain, and Buddhist temples to build his own *masjid*. It is customary for the visitor to climb the minar, and to stand with his back to the pillar of Raja Dhava and to clasp it with his arms. According to Farman Shah, the man who failed in the latter feat cast the gravest aspersion upon his own birth. I cannot vouch for the truth of this, since Farman Shah, like his employer, had a mind that delighted in the picturesque rather than the accurate. We none of us put the matter to the test, not even Farman Shah, who, I

am sure, was actuated, like us, by motives of dignity and not because he had reason to doubt his parents' honour. We did, however, climb the minar, leaving Farman Shah to pack the picnic baskets beside the unfinished minar of Ala-ad-Din, whose rough sandstone base was bathed in a bed of mauve verbena. The stairs of the minar were uneven, circular, and dark. As an experience it was worse than the belfries of Belgium or the monuments of Scotland, and I emerged from the stony darkness like Mrs. Macgregor—with a red face, and “pecking.”

Far below, the white shirt-tail of Farman Shah bent absorbed beside the baskets and the verbena, and, breathing hard, I thought that Ala-ad-Din had chosen the better part in not finishing his minar, and that there was more beauty and greater sense in an iron pillar that challenged your birthright rather than the muscles of your legs.

Beyond the Lal Kot—that had once been a fort and then a great mosque, and was now a mass of brown ruins, where the oldest tomb in India and the loveliest gateway, the Alai Darwaza, still survived—the plain stretched out on all sides, like the sea. Its surface was ruffled where the ground was thrown up into small hillocks that, from the uneasy height of the Kutb Minar, looked like waves. A strange silence brooded over the plain, as it lay in the brilliant sunshine, remembering old battles and the sack of once great cities, as if it were licking its old wounds that ached with the memory of bloodshed and violent death. There was a sorrow over it, that reminded one of the Campagna of Italy, that not even the defiant modernity of the New Delhi, seen like a pale shadow on the horizon, could take away.

Between the minar and the distant new city was an old ruined university. Stone passages and windows still stood, and, walking among the columns and looking out on the balconies, it was as if one could break through the time dimension and come upon a group of slender young thirteenth-century Indians at work, or gravely discoursing on a stone balcony that opened on to the plain. The scholars have

gone, and the seat of learning is a refuge for bats and bees, but the plain remains, and the old wells worked by bullocks are the same, and the wild ponies that ride over the dry, ruffled surface are perhaps descendants of other ponies who were there before the British came, before the Slave kings came who followed Mohammad Ghorî who drove the Hindus from Delhi.

The Fort of Tughlaqabad is about four miles from the Kutb Minar, and the whole of the ruined city is more than five miles in circumference. History asserts that this enormous city was built in two years. One of Farman Shah's new friends at the hotel had told him this, and he was convinced that it was true.

"It would take two years for us to see," he said grandly.

"I don't think we shall stay two years, this time," I answered.

A sudden storm was coming quickly up over the plain, the sky was a menacing orange colour, and sheet lightning played merrily round the car.

The tomb of Tughlaq Shah, a vast mausoleum enclosed within sloping walls and turrets, was more like a fortress than a resting-place for one of the silent people, as the dead are called. An old blind beggar had followed us from the road, and, as we walked along the walls, he wandered after the sound of our feet, and round the courtyard of the mausoleum, tapping with his stick and uttering weird cries. The full story of the Plain of Delhi can never be written until the day when some instrument is invented that can pick up the waves of sound from the past. But before that day comes, I shall be one of the silent people myself ; and standing looking down on the tapping beggar, with the lightning playing round my head, I was glad that I did not know all the story of Tughlaqabad, because I am sure it was full of weird as well as tragic things.

By the time we reached the Tomb of Humayan the storm was over, and the sky was again a serene, cloudless blue. The tomb is one of the earliest examples of the Moghul

school, simple and well-proportioned, and, to the delight of Farman Shah, he recognised Pathan blue tiles in the roof. The man in charge was likewise a Pathan, and he and the bearer made great friends, indulging in an animated conversation, wherein no doubt all our family histories, chief failings, and good qualities were duly related. By this time we were a party of six, as another northerner, clad in a black velvet waistcoat and the usual dangling shirt, had joined us. I don't know whether he had been invited by Farman Shah ; certainly I had not asked for his company.

In the central chamber, where in the dim, cool light stood the polished white marble tomb of Akbar's father, Farman Shah and his new friend prayed together. I do not know whether the tomb has any particularly holy tradition, or whether it was only that the hour of sunset was advancing, wherein all good Muslims remember their Creator.

Leaving the men to their devotions—Farman Shah's were somewhat hampered by a camera, a sunshade, and a purse of mine, which made the folding of his hands more a conjuring trick than a devotional act—we entered one of the small dark chambers that opened from the central hall. Here on a stifling September afternoon in the year 1857, within sight of the shining white tomb of the first of the hereditary Kings of the House of Tamur, Bahadur Shah, last of that great line, laid down the sword with which Humayan had hacked his way to power across the Plain of Delhi.

The ill-fated library of Humayan—from the stairs of which he fell like Humpty-Dumpty, breaking his crown and ending his brief reign as emperor—stands in the Purana Kila, which once was Indra's Field, in the days before there were hanging-gardens in Babylon. The light was beginning to lose its sharp brilliance, and, as the stairs of the library were no better than they had been on the day when Humayan went up to the roof to pray, I remembered Farman Shah's one eye and led the party towards the Sher Mosque, having no desire for a second edition of the Humpty-Dumpty story to appear in my family.

The Sher Mosque was of red sandstone ornamented with marble, slate, and coloured stonework. It had small pinnacles at the corners and a dome in the centre ; through the five horseshoe arches the enamel-work of the interior blazed into the fading light. Two slender cypresses stood sentinel outside, and beyond the wall that surrounds the Purana Kila the earth fell away to the plain below. The *masjid* and the cypresses were silhouetted against the sky, and an intense silence like unstruck music quivered about them.

Farman Shah was deeply impressed. He went and stood with one foot raised on the low wall and looked wistfully across the plain. He was temperamental, and the beauty of it made him sad. He may also have been thinking that we were making it abominably late for his supper.

The old walls of the Purana Kila circle what was once the city. Beyond the library, across the well-kept grass and past the bath-house and the gate to the Jamna, we walked to the Lal Darwaza. The sun was falling low and the evening light lay softly on the old walls, and the shadows were long and there were cypress-trees. Through an archway in the wall that opened on to the plain, a single tree was framed. I share the Moghul love of archways and that which is seen beyond.

Whatever else I may have brought back from Delhi, and I do not speak of stone pottery nor of turquoise rings, at least I have the remembrance of that tree as it stood alone where the strange, sad Plain of Delhi touched the first city, and night was creeping over the hard ground and the bright lights of the twentieth century were making storied circles round the last, impermanent city.

PART III
AMONG THE TWICE-BORN

CHAPTER I

THE MILLIONAIRE'S HOUSE

WE HAD REACHED a world of mosquito-nets, fans, and iced lemonade. All the spring and summer flowers of England were blooming side by side in the compounds. A fierce sun burned in a cloudless sky, and the day temperature had soared above the normal European summer records. At the Club people were greeting each other with a resentful : " It has begun far too early this year. This cursed heat. It'll be a terribly hot summer, I'm afraid."

It was a land rich in trees, and everywhere there were palms, tamarisks, acacia, silk cotton. The gold mohur and the flame of the forest were beginning to flower, and the yellow and scarlet blossoms were like banners of welcome to our eager eyes. A sluggish, green river wound across the country and flowed silently and slowly through the city. Tall palm-trees overhung its banks, stooping to dip their spiky leaves in the thick dark stream ; monkeys chattered in the undergrowth, and there were clumps of water-lilies with swollen buds and pale exotic flowers. Green parrots flew with harsh screams, and the carpenter-bird never ceased his sharp monotonous cry. Two thousand feet above the sea, the plateau stretched out on all sides, an immense table-land, fertile and rich after the barren frontier passes.

The air had a quality that was both soft and sparkling ; and the temper of the crowds was gentler, less hurried ; and the women wore skirts of red and yellow, and heavy silver ornaments—bangles, anklets, and toe-rings.

The roads leading from the city were thronged with bullock-carts and tongas. There was a *mela*, or fair, at a

Hindu temple some miles outside the city. The temple was built on a piece of rising ground, and the road to the hillside was lined with stalls that sold coloured grain, sweets, toys, and clothes. The brilliant reds and yellow mingled with the sunshine, dazzling the eyes, and the air thrummed with the sound of drums and strange, high, nasal, surging voices.

It was the season of gaiety, as the marriage month was beginning. On a road beyond the palace, out by one of the large tanks that watered the country, the marriage procession of the Maharaja's cousin slowly beat its way with drums and pipes and singing women. The State servants in their yellow uniform were followed by two slow-stepping elephants with silver howdahs and swinging trunks. Behind the elephants came a large grey State car, in which sat the groom and as many of his male relatives as were able to find accommodation. The groom's head was wrapped in gold tinsel and fringes, completely hiding his face from the vulgar gaze. The marriage ceremonies had begun, and in front of the hapless young man there stretched a vista of thirty dinner-parties, one for each night of the month, before he and his bride would be considered man and wife. It was an exhausting penalty to pay for a royal union.

Not far from the palace with its lovely gardens and tranquil river, where, the uncharitable said, the attempt to achieve Versailles had ended in the setting up of the marble halls of a Lyons Corner House, was the sound of tapping hammers. Where once a quiet guest-house stood, they were making a Moghul garden for a Hindu prince whose ambitions had been stirred by the fashions of the Côte d'Azur, and there had arisen a house of steel and glass, perfect in every modern detail, from its mechanical contrivances for cooling the air to its fabrics from France and its silver chairs from Germany. In the hall hung two portraits of the prince and his wife, by a French painter. The pictures faced each other on either side of the staircase. The girl was young and lovely, in white satin and emeralds—just a society portrait such as one might see

any year in the Royal Academy. But the portrait of the prince had a strange, impelling significance. He was painted, tall and slender, in Savile Row evening dress, leaning against a pillar. On a high mantelpiece to the left stood two white vases. At first glance they were like two cocktail-shakers on an American bar. The evening cloak of the prince was lined with white satin. It was a picture where black and white predominated, of heavy shadows and contrasting hard high lights. One of his hands was on his hip. The fingers were exaggeratedly long and fine, almost like a skeleton's. His face was thin, and his hawk-like features were sharp. But his expression was weary and rather wistful. It was the portrait of modern Europe's gift to Asia : the picture of an Indian prince who had looked on the decadence of the West.

The Indian States are in many ways a survival from another age. And if they seem an anachronism to the twentieth-century mind, it is perhaps because the multitude has little or no sympathy with the mediæval dream. The dark ages are dark to many who refuse to see, in their burning intensity for the beauty of pageantry combined with their cold indifference to the sufferings of the under-dog, anything but a callous and a wanton selfishness. For mediævalism flourishes amid the extreme of paradox, wherein the flower of beauty and breeding heads a procession that is ended by the dwarf and the leprous beggar. It is useless to try to understand it by reason. Only in those dim moments when the intuitive force of the senses has control is one given a glimpse into the past, showing how the roots of the mediæval spirit spring from a soil that is rich in stored antiquities, strange, perverted, without pity, but lovely with a feverish heat that burns to reconcile the contrasts of love and hate, generosity and greed, beauty and the ugliness of want.

The Stuarts were the last of the kings to live as kings in the mediæval sense in Britain, for the Georges were merely vulgar, and since then we have grown accustomed to the synonym of crown and service. It is difficult for the democratic British mind to grasp at all the significance of what the

princes are trying to live up to. It is all muddled and tawdry now, for the marble is cracked, the mosaic inlay has been replaced by imitations from the West. The lovely austere palaces, the shadowed gardens where fountains played and peacocks cried, have crumbled into ruins. The classical tradition of the Vedic days, when men were pure in heart and simple in life although they were princes, has been lost under the conflicting influences of centuries of alien intrusion. It is the mediæval conscience that survives, with its dream of beauty and its terror of ugliness : the beauty that is beautiful for its own sake, and the love that is enamoured of its own reflection. . . .

"Remember," counselled Mr. Brook, "that in India the walls have ears."

"But we are not going to the palace to-day."

"No, but we are going to visit a millionaire's house, and money, in Asia, is power, even as it is in the West."

I felt that Mr. Brook exaggerated. I was not in the habit of making adverse criticism on people's taste in furniture while I was out calling. I had noticed a tendency on the part of Mr. Brook to suspicion. In the middle of a harmless conversation at luncheon the day before, he had started when Farman Shah put a plate in front of him.

"Who is that man ? Does he speak English ?"

"He is our bearer, and he understands every word."

"I thought I had never seen him before. Is he trustworthy ?"

I felt impelled to reply grandly : "Farman Shah and I have no secrets from each other."

Now here again was the same attitude of caution. It was something new, something alien both to the stern Frontier and to the battlefields of Delhi.

The car turned in through the millionaire's gateway. There were not many flower-beds in the compound, but there was no sense of barrenness. What was lacking from the horticultural point of view was fully made up for by the profusion of manufactured art imitations. I have often

thought bitterly on a sultry afternoon in June, when conscience suggested that I ought to do some weeding, that gardens should be the abode not of flower-beds, but of statuary instead. After my visit to the millionaire's garden, I realised my heresy. Fountains played in front of the house, and there were seats and balustrades of Indian marble. Where the innocent heads of roses should have drooped in the hot sunshine, Venus and all her nymphs and satellites postured in startling white, fresh from a Viennese factory. And, lest the old-fashioned should be dismayed by the absence of trees, the millionaire had planted a forest of coloured glass, with dangling balls the size of footballs.

The millionaire's house was strangely silent. Our footsteps echoed on the yellow-and-white tiles of the hall. A series of sitting-rooms opened into each other. They were furnished with heavy hangings and gilt frames, and in the centre of each an upholstered swing hung on silver chains from a mahogany stand.

"The old man likes to swing when he's entertaining his friends," Mr. Brook explained.

"Perhaps he likes to think of the millions of ages that pass while the swing goes on."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that, between the poles of the conscious and the unconscious, his mind has made a swing."

"I think," Mr. Brook said hastily, "that we had better go on and see his bedroom."

"Oh, but would that be quite tactful?"

"Perfectly. He never uses it now. He lives in a tiny place in the city, near his office."

"Surely it's rather a waste to keep all this up, then?"

"The old man has lost his interest in all that side of life. You see, he is getting quite old."

The millionaire's bedroom was almost entirely filled by the bed, which was hung with electric lights. It was a four-poster, and its roof was made of glass, on which were painted swans and water-lilies. When I saw the bed, I realised why the

millionaire preferred to live frugally in the city. It was not the kind of bed which was conducive to sleep.

Beyond the bedroom was a study, and a bathroom divided into two—half European, half Hindu. The kitchens were at the end of the passage, outside the millionaire's suite. They were divided into three, in order to provide for the needs of guests of three religions. They were the cleanest kitchens I have ever seen.

The house was built round two courtyards that were open to the sky. The second courtyard was for the purdah ladies. Their rooms opened on to the verandah that ran round the four sides of the square. In the centre, the sunshine fell on to palms in pots and boxes of flowers. The rooms were furnished in European style. These were large and light and clean. Young women in pale saris, with grave, lovely faces, sat with their sewing in their hands. As Clare and I walked slowly round the verandah, they glanced out indifferently, and then returned to their work. Either they were accustomed to visitors, or else they were too polite to stare at us. As we passed the room that led into the suite of the wife of the millionaire's son, I was thinking that his father must be a very old man to have lost all interest in his house.

Mr. Brook was waiting for us in the gallery upstairs that was built over the front verandah. At the end of the gallery there were folding doors leading into an ante-room. The ante-room was empty save for three large pictures that hung round the three sides.

"These pictures represent the meeting of Vishnu with a Hindu maiden," said Mr. Brook.

"But they are exactly the same."

"Are they? Look again."

In the first picture, Vishnu and the maid wore garlands of pure white flowers. In the second, the flowers were tipped with pink; and in the third, they were flushed with the rose-colour of love. As I looked, I realised the subtle difference in the expression of the eyes in the three pictures.

"The very walls have ears," I thought, and I was silent.

There was no sound behind us, yet, with that curious sense that India develops, I knew that we were no longer alone. I turned, and at my elbow stood the millionaire's son.

He was bare-headed, and his curly hair had a tousled look, as if he had newly risen from a sleep. He wore a peach-coloured silk shirt, with no collar, that was fastened at the neck with a diamond the size of a thumb-nail. Below his shirt hung the graceful muslin folds of a dhoti, and on his feet were pale grey sandals.

There was a moment's silence. He smiled boyishly, sweetly, with an undercurrent of malice. So Mr. Brook had brought the *bura sahib's* guests to see the famous pictures. . . . I had a hot sense of guilt, as if I had been buying postcards in Charing Cross.

The millionaire's son led us into the library for the English guests. It was months since I had seen so many books in one room. There were cases full of new books that looked as if they were never read. The millionaire's son was an ardent polo-player, and ardent polo-players, even in India, usually spend their leisure hours otherwise than in reading books. He showed us a photograph of himself and his two sons and three daughters. They were charming children, and there was a shy look of boyish pride on his face as he put the photograph back on the piano. He was only twenty-four.

The latest wireless gramophone had just arrived. He began explaining it to us eagerly. The little boy with his mechanical toy dies hard in all men, even in polo-playing Hindus with five children.

He came down into the yellow-and-white tiled hall, and shook hands with us. "My father is waiting in the city to receive you," he said.

The city had a more sophisticated air than Peshawar. There were pavements, and the houses were built of solid stucco or brick. There were brilliant coloured stalls selling fruit or gilded shoes ; and, though lepers crouched in the

gutter and there were beggars with twisted limbs, the harsh wind of the Frontier did not blow through its side alleys.

Beyond the city palace and the oldest temple in the State, where the striking of a bell ensured good health to the man who touched its greasy tongue, was the Jain temple that the millionaire had built, and next door was his office, where he received us blandly. He was sitting on a white cushion on a white drugget. He was dressed entirely in transparent white muslin, and round his neck hung strings of pearls and uncut emeralds. One white rose was stuck behind his ear. His head was uncovered and entirely hairless. He looked like a very fat, clean, long-clothes baby made of pale-brown india-rubber.

He waved his hand graciously. "My office is yours. Go upstairs if you please, and you will see my pearls, my emeralds, my diamonds. Anything you wish."

Diamonds or dancing-girls, I thought. Money is the great consoler; and the man who had lost interest in the house of the glass balls and the staring white Venuses could still run his fingers through the cool, gleaming heaps of pearls in the cabinets of the office upstairs, or watch with loving eyes the warm crimson depths of his rubies and the cold enchantment of his emeralds.

As I looked from the bright blue velvet slippers, that kept my shoes from defiling the mirrored floor of the temple, to the harshly shining glass mosaics on the walls, I reflected that the power of money was as powerful here as in the West.

"What," Mr. Brook asked, "do you think of the temple?"

The temple was made of small pieces of mirror. There were mirrors above us, mirrors below us, and mirrors on all sides. Brilliant lights hung from the ceilings, whose dazzling brilliance was magnified by the mirrors.

"Perhaps the millionaire was anxious to make sure that his god should not see his face as in a glass, darkly."

"Hush," said Mr. Brook. He looked quickly from side to side. "There are spies everywhere," he murmured.

"After all," I said as the car drove away, "it was kind to provide blue velvet slippers. Don't think we're ungrateful. It's only that we are a little tired of glass. Is there nowhere that we could visit that is without coloured glass or jewels?"

"Yes. We are on our way to the Chuttris."

The Chuttris were the roofed-over tombs of the prince's ancestors. They were shut away from the world, behind high walls beyond the city. The doors were open, as if the monk in charge expected us. I think perhaps we were before our time, however, for when we walked through the doors into the quiet world of trees and crumbling grey stone, the priest in charge was still in the act of putting on his clothes, which lay on the steps of one of the tombs. With perfect composure, he picked up his garments one by one, then, fully dressed, he advanced to greet us. We received his greeting gravely, being much too polite to suggest that he was locking the stable door after the flight of the horse.

The earliest tombs of the family were lovely with their domed roofs and mellow grey walls. In the clear sunshine the trees seemed strangely dark and quiet, and there was a brooding sense of peace that gave us back a right judgment after the flagrant coloured glass and mirrored halls. There were other consolations after all. There was sunshine and the warm feel of old stone against the hand, and if the priest had neither the diamonds nor the dancing girls, he had these.

"Now," said the indefatigable Mr. Brook, "we must go to the palace, and you must sign your names in the book."

"Must we really? Another day would do."

"No, it would not. Besides, there are no mirrors there."

"No, but there is gilt and marble and crimson damask."

"After the palace we had better go to the Residency."

"We've been there. We've seen the Corinthian pillars and the gardens, and signed our names."

"We want to visit the haunted tree where the mutineers

hid. And we want to say, 'Salaam, tree,' and to forget the existence of millionaires and their houses."

"Hush," said Mr. Brook uneasily, "you'll be overheard."

As I looked at Mr. Brook, I remembered that, although he had been born in Europe in the nineteenth century, he had spent the last fifteen years in the middle ages.

CHAPTER II

MRS. MARSHALL

“**W**HERE HAVE YOU BEEN?” our hostess asked, as we pushed open the wire doors into the drawing-room.

We stood in the middle of the cool, shaded room, hot, dusty, and triumphant.

“We’ve had such a wonderful walk. Past the haunted tree to the cross-roads, then along to the right, through a delicious shady road near a small farm.

“There we met a jackal, only we thought it was a dog at first. And after that two sacred cows came ambling along, and, as I am afraid of bulls of both sexes, we cut down through the wood to the edge of the river, and picked our way above the banks.

“And there were palm-trees hanging over the water, and masses of water-lilies. It was gloriously green and tropical. Then we came to a bridge, which we crossed, and took some photographs from there of the beginnings of the city.”

“Did you come back by the Residency?”

“No; we turned into the gardens and came through them and past the club. The flowers in the gardens were gorgeous.”

“This is Mrs. Marshall.”

Seated on the sofa, dressed in a blue-and-white washing-frock, was a woman with the set, well-preserved air of the early forties. She had an upright, spare figure, keen brown eyes, well-cut, aquiline features, and a smooth skin of warm peach-like tints. Her voice was firm, modulated, and precise; the steady light of her eyes and the set of her rather square shoulders proclaimed that she had an iron will.

"Well," she said, "you did have a long walk this hot morning. I suppose the gardens were quite empty?"

"No; there were a good many young men wandering about."

"Young men?" Her voice was incredulous.

"Yes. I think they were students. They all had books, as if they were studying. And lots of them were sitting on the grass, working."

"Oh, Indians! I thought for a minute you meant Englishmen." She turned to our hostess. "Fancy, what a change since I lived here. Those were the good old days when no Indian was allowed to put his nose inside the gardens. Think of that. If you had been there then, you would have had your walk through those lovely gardens with nothing to spoil your pleasure in the flower-beds and the well-kept grass."

"I don't think the students contaminated the flowers. They were absolutely quiet and orderly, learning their lessons, and they have such graceful ways of moving and sitting. I think they added flavour to the gardens, and I'm glad they were there."

"Well, you've got funny taste."

"You see, I am fresh out from England, and it is such a relief to find a public garden with only some quiet students in it, instead of a pack of chattering nursery-maids pushing prams, and children tearing about on fairy bicycles."

"Don't you like children?"

"I like Indians better," I answered, laughing. Before Mrs. Marshall had time to reply to this monstrous heresy, I asked permission of our hostess for us to go and wash for luncheon.

Mrs. Marshall held the table with her talk. Everything about her was clear-cut and decisive: her manner, her voice, her conversation, and her way of eating. She exuded vitality and capability from every pore: the kind of companion who, after an hour or two, is exhausting. She demanded, and obtained, attention and admiration. The servants, as they waited, watched her. Abdul Rahim's wife was ill that day,

and Farman Shah had taken his place to help Old Bearer. I saw that he was listening to what Mrs. Marshall said. She talked about her two daughters in England, of whom she was extremely proud.

"My eldest girl is married and has three children. They live in Chester. Then my younger divides her time between Helen's house and London. She's studying art, you know, and they say she has a good deal of talent."

"I suppose she will be coming out to you soon?"

"Oh, no. I sent them both home, of course, to school, and Helen's never been out again. She married at nineteen. Mary did come out for six months, but she wasn't happy. She didn't like India." There was a small silence, then Mrs. Marshall added rapidly: "My daughter is not like you, Miss Farmer; she likes children. Her nieces and nephew are more to her than all India."

I laughed. "I never said I didn't like children. I said I liked Indians better. At that moment I was thinking that Indians weren't for ever screaming and playing."

"If that's how you feel, you would like Indian children, for they never play. That was one of the things Mary was so appalled by. It made her quite unhappy. 'Mother,' she said, 'it's terrible; these children don't know how to play unless you teach them. They just stay quietly where they are put down. It's terrible.'"

"What an easy time their mothers must have."

Mrs. Marshall snorted. "A pack of lazy, inefficient dolls; they'd have an easy time anyhow. Don't speak to me of Indian women."

Over coffee in the drawing-room, our hostess asked after Mr. Marshall.

"Oh, John—he's very well, though he is always fancying there is something the matter with him. He knows too much, that is the trouble. But of course he's as well as I am, really. He's always threatening to go home and buy a house. But it's only a threat. I say: 'Go Home. By all means go Home and buy a house; but don't imagine that I'm going with

you.' It's ridiculous at my age. I was born in India. I went Home to school for two or three years. I came out here and married. My father went Home only to die, and I say to John, if he goes Home, he'll die. I took my children and put them into schools. I went again when Helen was married ; otherwise it's been India always for me. And John thinks I am ready to start a new life over again at my age, in another country, with another climate. It's absurd. But men are all like that ; they have no practical sense at all."

I had a vision of John, gentle, kindly, his life slowly ebbing away before the ruthless vitality of his wife. I looked at her as she sat, hard and capable, on the edge of the deep-bosomed arm-chair. No lolling for her, either spiritual or physical. I wondered how old she was. She appeared to be about forty-three, but she talked of age, and she had grandchildren. Surely she was older than she seemed.

Presently Old Bearer came to say the car had come for memsahib. We rose a little wearily. It was long past our usual hour for afternoon sleep. But it was obvious that Mrs. Marshall would never have allowed herself to indulge in a daily rest.

" Well," she said, as we shook hands, " I'm sure I hope you enjoy the rest of your tour in India. And if you do manage to get up to Kashmir, look me up. I'll be glad to see you, though I'm afraid I wouldn't provide you with any Indian society. And don't get carried away with the idea that you like Indians, or that you ought to pity them. They're a lot of dirty, lazy liars."

Then, as she was about to turn away, she paused, as if something impelled her, and she added : " But I'll say this, if the subject interests you—and I know more about India than you have any idea of. Prestige counts for a great deal in this country. You modern people think you can do as you please nowadays. Well, whatever it may be like at Home, in this country you can't. An Indian said to me the other day : ' If England loses India, one of the contributory causes will be the behaviour of the white women in India. The time is

coming when we are going to refuse to serve under a nation who has lost the power of keeping even its own womenfolk in check.' Don't forget that."

"No," I said gloomily, and I thought of one of the mental pictures I was going to take home from India, and it was a picture I wished I had never seen. It was of Lahore station at ten o'clock at night, and on the platform there were three young girls whose mothers, and whose grandmothers, had been in the fullest and most accepted sense of the word "ladies"; and these girls, and the subalterns who were with them, were quite drunk. Even more than the noisy inebriation of the girls, what I could not forget was the expression on the faces of the watching Indians.

Mrs. Marshall's dark-blue car was waiting outside the verandah. A smart Muslim chauffeur and a well-cared-for dog were inside. Mrs. Marshall took her place behind the wheel. The dog sat between his mistress and the chauffeur. With firm, quiet hands she put the car into gear, and, with a farewell gesture, accelerated, and was gone.

Slowly we turned back into the quiet drawing-room.

My hostess put her hand on my arm.

"I suppose," I said, "Mr. Marshall is just what I imagine him to be?"

"Yes, I think he is. Very charming and sweet, but getting rather frail now, I fancy."

"And I imagine her father must have been of the same type as Mr. Marshall, and her mother just like her. Women like that generally run in families. Her grandmother was probably just such another in her day."

"What do you think her grandmother was like?"

"The image of Mrs. Marshall: strong, capable, managing the household, imposing her will ruthlessly on everyone with whom she came in contact."

My hostess sank wearily into the deep-bosomed chair that Mrs. Marshall had disdained to loll in.

"Her grandmother was a Mohammedan woman of the north, who was born and died in purdah. She never even

set eyes on her English son-in-law. Her daughter, Mrs. Marshall's mother, could talk English, but, if you went to see her, she received you sitting on a cushion, and to the end she ate with her fingers and refused to use a knife and fork when she was alone with her family. When she died, the daughter was sent home to be educated by her father's sisters. She came out at the age of eighteen, and in two years she married Marshall."

"And her skin? She is as fair as I am—fairer, because I'm now so sunburnt."

"In half an hour you could be as fair again as she, if you took the trouble. Nothing is a trouble to Mrs. Marshall, not even her complexion."

"And I have always been told that Anglo-Indians were weak and lazy and ungroomed."

"Now that you have seen Mrs. Marshall, you know better."

"Does she really think that abusing her mother's people makes her a hundred per cent British?"

"I'm afraid she does. She has entirely repudiated her mother's people. In spite of her pots of creams and boxes of powder *naturelle*, she is not going to risk saying one word in favour of her Indian blood. It is the one weak spot in an otherwise strong character. The heel of Achilles—we all have it, whereby man betrays himself. Without that she would be stupendous."

"She is quite stupendous enough. I am sorry for Mr. Marshall. How tired he must be!"

CHAPTER III

THE ONCE-BORN SUDRA

IT HAS BEEN ASSERTED that there is an affinity between the Rajputs and the Highlanders of Scotland. Not only have they many common characteristics, such as hot temper, strong wills, kind hearts, and keen sportsmanship, but they are also believed, by some, to be descended, through the Scythians, from the same warrior branch of the Aryan race that once roamed through Europe and Asia before it divided into separate streams of people flowing east and west in search of a permanent home. By the same token, the icy blasts of Scottish wind have reddened the hair and cheeks of the Celt, even as the fierce sun has darkened the skin and hair of the Rajput.

The same authorities are quick to discover a further amiable trait in both peoples : they claim that every Highlander born and every member of the Rajput caste is a gentleman at heart, however simple his calling may be. I am not prepared to dispute this theory. I have known Highlanders who had the hearts of bullies and bounders, and I can only claim acquaintance with one Rajput.

My friend the Rajput was a chauffeur, and, in every sense of the word, he was, as Farman Shah maintained, "a sahib." He had been the friend, as well as the chauffeur, of a Maharaja ; but, when the prince died, he had not cared to linger in a place where now the morning sun was darkened for him. He had come, therefore, to a neighbouring State, and had taken service at the house where we were staying. His manners were quiet and gentle, and he knew when to entertain his master's guests with the history and customs

of the State, and when to let them sit silently behind him, drinking in the beauty of the fertile plateau and the pale waters of the tanks that gave it sustenance.

Farman Shah admired him extravagantly at a respectful distance. Occasionally his heart was delighted by a few moments' conversation while the car waited by the verandah steps. There was, however, no sense of rivalry between them. Farman Shah would as soon have thought of comparing himself to the moon. The chauffeur was a Rajput sahib, and there the matter ended.

Besides the chauffeur, there was Old Bearer and his son Abdul Rahim. The first night that we arrived it was dark and late. The white bungalow loomed strangely out of the encircling compound full of trees. Lights hung from the verandah ceiling, and the doors into the drawing-room stood open. There were ferns and pots of begonias and basket-chairs on the verandah, and in the centre, under the light, stood Old Bearer. He had a neatly trimmed beard, and he wore a white puggari and a long maroon coat.

"This is Old Bearer," our hostess said. "He has been with us so long, and he has seen us through trouble as well as happiness. He is entirely one of the family."

Old Bearer and I looked at each other, and I saw in his face the loyalty and honesty that make service beautiful in every country in the world. He stood there, solid and comfortable and kind, and momentarily I forgot that I belonged to the insecure, tightrope world of adults. It seemed as if a high guard, and a flickering fire and nursery tea must be waiting for me beyond the wire doors of the drawing-room. As I put out my hand and said, "Salaam, Bearer," there was a mist before my eyes.

That night, he went to my friend, and said : "It is lucky day for the house that Miss Sahib come. I see her eyes when she shakes hands with me."

Old Bearer did not know that as I greeted him I saw a presence that is gone for ever.

No one in his senses could have been jealous of Old Bearer,

and his son Abdul Rahim was Farman Shah's friend. But the moment Swami arrived we realised that a better servant than he was amongst us.

Swami got out of the train, dressed in a neat brown linen suit, with a round brown cap on his head, and his dark southern face shone with efficiency. His shirt was well tucked into his trousers, and down the centre of each leg there was a visible crease. I think it was the crease that impressed us most.

"What is the name of the bungalow? Leave everything to me, Miss Sahib." As he spoke, he slipped a book into his pocket. He had evidently been reading in the train.

The next day I took a message from our hostess to Miss James. Swami was in the room. He was down on the floor, tying up a parcel. Farman Shah also tied up parcels, but, when he did so, the room vibrated with his excitement and energy. Swami worked with noiseless speed that reminded me of a London shopman.

He spent his leisure hours reading on the verandah outside Miss James's room. The other servants avoided him. Not only was he a Madrasi Hindu, but his efficiency irritated them. He was as interested in sightseeing as Farman Shah, and, as he was the new-comer, Farman Shah had to stay at home, and Swami sat in the cherished place beside the Rajput chauffeur. One still, hot day, when the rays of the sun fiercely beat into the car, Swami put his hand into his pocket and drew out a pair of glare-glasses, which he gravely put on. I thought of Farman Shah's cataract, that was the result of dust and glare and neglect, and I did not wonder that Swami was unpopular with the other servants.

One evening we were driving towards Piplya Tank, and Swami was not with us. Miss James had been telling us of the trinkets that he had bought that day, in the city, for his little girl.

"Of course, Swami is not a twice-born," I said; and was there, perhaps, a shade of malice in my voice? My cousin in Peshawar had probably felt the same prickings of

irritation when I had boasted of Farman Shah's superior intelligence.

"Swami is not a sweeper, if you mean that."

"No, I don't mean that. I expect he is a once-born, a Sudra, of what the Veda call 'the slave-bands of black descent.' He isn't an Aryan, you know."

"I suppose you can't imagine anyone of non-Aryan descent having the brains or feelings of a human being?"

"Not at all. I've never wanted to think of myself as belonging to the chosen people of God. But legend says that at the creation of the world the Brahmins proceeded out of the mouth of God, and the Sudras out of His feet. Modern science is kind enough to allow us to accept all legend as the sum of human experience. And it's true, because the Brahmins are the brains of India, and the Sudras are the servants."

Miss James snorted. "Brains, indeed! If all your twice-born had the brains and character of Swami, India would be ready for complete independence and self-government tomorrow."

The car stopped in a grove of trees. A flight of steps led up to the path that encircled the lake.

"Perhaps," our hostess said, "we shall see some of Cicely's once-born at the other side of the lake. There is a village there, and the peasants live their own quiet lives without troubling whether they proceeded out of anyone's feet." As she spoke, my friend was smiling. There were moments when her guests amused her.

Two girls in scarlet skirts stood among the reeds by the edge of Piplya Tank. On the path that circled the lake stood a row of heavy brass pots filled with water. The girls bent over the thick green water, drawing the pots below the surface and raising them, brimming full of oily scum and water. The sound of our voices and footsteps caught their attention, and they paused, with the pots held above their heads, to watch the turn of the path. Tall bushes hid our approach, and they waited curiously, wondering what

manner of strangers the evening was bringing them. Their arms were covered from wrist to elbow with silver ornaments, and they wore heavy, coarse anklets and toe-rings. They stood holding their water-pots, with arms upraised, and answered our greetings with the quiet unself-consciousness of country people.

"Is that water used for drinking and cooking?" asked the friend who was with us who spoke their language.

"Yes, Memsahib. It is strained before it is used."

"But not boiled?"

"No, Memsahib, not boiled. It is not necessary."

The girls looked at us with shy amusement. What questions these people asked. Boiled water—who had ever heard of such a thing? One of the girls began to laugh, and then broke off quickly, ashamed of her own temerity.

"How old are you?"

"I am about sixteen, I think."

"And your friend?"

She shook her head. She did not know her age. A woman married and bore children, and presently the children were no longer children; and they in their turn married. And so it went on, and no one noticed the passing years. It was all a part of foolishness, like the boiling of water, to bother whether one were fifteen or twenty.

"I think," the other said, who was the more intelligent, "that she is about the same age as I am."

"You are, of course, both married?"

"Yes, Memsahib, we are married, and we live in the village down in the hollow behind those palm-trees."

"Poor things," our friend said. "It is not a healthy place for a village. The tanks are malarial. Look how anæmic those girls are. They are both certainly riddled with malaria."

"What a pity it is that the loveliest places are nearly always unfit for human habitation!"

It was six o'clock, and the sun was dipping, and the light had taken on that magic quality that comes with evening

in the East. The lake was full of wild duck and cormorants. A group of grey long-legged cranes was feeding in a field of palm-trees on the other side of the path. There was a flight of green parrots overhead ; and one pink cloud, large and fluffy, floated serenely in a clear golden sky. In the distance, from the village in the hollow that was hidden by tall bushes of cochineal, came the sound of singing.

Presently, down the path came some young men and children. They stopped beside us, and spoke to the girls. In my hands I held bags of *mittie*. I had bought the sweets from an old man by the shrine at the other side of the tank. I had intended to feed the sacred fish that swarmed in the oily depths of water round the shrine. But, when I saw how sleek and well fed the fish seemed as they leered up at us, I felt that there were others in the world whose need was greater than theirs. The children wore a single garment each, and their heads and feet were bare. They held out small dark hands, and I poured the sweets into their palms.

"There are other children in the village," one of the young men said, with dispassionate justice. "If the Mem-sahibs will come, they shall see for themselves."

The men and the children led the way. Turning down a steep path from the lake-side, we followed in the wake of a boy who was leading three bullocks. The hillside rose again out of the valley of cochineal bushes ; on its slope the village was built. It was just a cluster of mud huts with open fronts. Pie dogs, goats, bullocks, and children roamed in the clearing in front of the huts, and up the hillside between the palm-trees. Cakes of cow-dung were spread out to dry. The huts had been washed over with cow-dung and water to make them smooth and clean.

The women had gathered in front of one of the huts, and were sitting with their babies, singing. There was to be a wedding in the house, and the family had gone to the city to fetch the bride. The women were singing, to bring good luck

to the house. The colours were all of reds and browns and yellows, against a beige background ; beige earth, beige walls, and beige bullocks.

One of the women invited us to enter and inspect the hut, but the head woman of the village intervened sharply.

“ Have you nothing better to do than to sit there grinning and showing your teeth ? This is not your house, and you have no business to invite strangers into it.”

One of the men came with a slice of *pappya* laid on a palm-leaf. “ After your walk, you are thirsty,” he said.

We thanked him, and said that it was not our hour for eating. He looked disappointed, and asked leave to bring us a whole *pappya*. “ The Memsahibs can take it with them, and eat it when their hour for food comes.”

These people earned only a few annas (pence) in the day, working in the fields. Their generosity touched us. We were strangers who had come amongst them, and we must be fed.

In the evening air the village seemed peaceful and lovely, and the people, in spite of their poverty, were contented. Poverty in that climate is not ugly and terrible as it is in the slums of the West.

I gave the children the rest of the *mittie*, and the change from the rupee that the old man by the shrine had given me when I bought the bags of sweets.

Slowly we walked back down the path by the tank. The women were still singing in the village. Their voices sounded sweet and subdued in the distance. One little boy followed us. My friend was angry, and told him repeatedly : “ *Gao, gao.*” But he paid no attention, and kept doggedly at our heels.

“ It is not right of him. You gave the children all the money you had. He has no business to follow us.”

Presently a woman came round a bend in the path in front of us. She had a little girl in her arms, and another

at her skirts. The boy brushed past us, and ran on to meet them. He had not been begging, only going out to find his mother. The woman had a thin and anxious face, and she and the children wore ragged skirts. She was a widow, and her only means of support was gathering cow-dung for the villages.

Neither of my companions had any money with them. I had gone out that evening with one rupee and a handful of odd annas in my pocket, and now the purse was empty. I thought of all the bazaars wherein I had squandered money ; of all the beads and bags and what-nots I was taking home as presents to people who had no need of presents. I remembered the occasions when I had gone out with a full purse and bought nothing. There was some point in almsgiving in a country where a few rupees would keep a family in comfort for a month. The bitterness of it was that the morrow was our last day, and every hour was filled with some project that would make it impossible for me to return to Piplya in search of the widow.

That night we dined in the palace of the Maharaja. We sat in a dining-hall whose walls were hung with pictures by English artists ; we sat on French chairs, and ate food cooked by French hands and served by Swiss footmen. On my left hand sat a Paris art-dealer, who was not travelling in India for the good of his health.

I thought of Piplya Tank, and how the darkness had crept round the hillside, enveloping the village, until one by one the singing women had fallen asleep and there was no sound but the sighing of the wind through the palm-trees. I wondered where the widow and her children slept, and whether, if I had had twenty rupees with me, she would have bought a mud hut and washed it clean with cow-dung and water.

Then I remembered that this was the state of the Mediæval Dream. It was therefore necessary that widows and children should live like the beasts of the field in order that princes might entertain French art-dealers, and build palaces of

steel and glass, when the whim of the moment took them. For if the culture of the twentieth century has caught the fancy of Hindu princes, it is the manner and conscience of the thirteenth that still persists, urging them forward in their perverted dream of beauty.

CHAPTER IV

THE TEMPLE OF KĀLI

THE SCARLET POINSETTIAS in the gardens of the palace blazed under a hot noonday sun. The silk cotton-trees and the gold mohurs were in full bloom, and there was trailing morning glory and banks of verbenas. The stucco walls of the palace reflected the light and heat, and the onslaught of colour hurt the eyes with its crude splendour. But in the cool shade under the archway, by the broad flight of steps that led up to the entrance, there were delicate green ferns in pots, and the Dewan in his white jodhpurs and his pink Mahratta hat stood, graceful and gracious, waiting to receive us.

The drawing-rooms of the palace were a vision of plush, and lace curtains, and cabinets full of silver. Across a tiled square courtyard, open to the harsh sunlight and bordered by a row of supercilious-looking cactus-trees in terra-cotta pots, the lank figure of Farman Shah hurried between our bedrooms, bustling about with suitcases.

"This is very good *banderbast*," he said importantly. "The Maharaja he give eight annas a day to all the bearers for food."

"That is very handsome of him."

I went to look out of the window at the back of the room. Beyond the wide gravel path that surrounded the palace there was a grass compound full of trees, and in the centre stood an old ruined temple.

"When the Maharaja comes of age he is going to restore the temple. His tutor told me so."

A disapproving grunt came from the other side of the bed.

Clare had gone to her own room through an intervening series of sitting-rooms and bedrooms. All the rooms in the palace had both communicating doors and doors opening on to the courtyard.

"There are only Hindus here. You and Abdul Rahim must be feeling quite lost among them all."

"Abdul Rahim is going to the bazaar to get the *roti kana*. And they are saying that there is a Moghul university here. And Miss Sahib must see the Lal Masjid."

"The university was Hindu first before it was taken by the Moghuls, and it belongs to Hindus again." There was a trace of obstinacy in my voice. There had been a long motor-drive and an hour's sightseeing and shopping in a garrison town between me and breakfast. I was not going to be browbeaten by Farman Shah. "I am going to see the fort and the prison, whatever else I see." I did not add : "I'm tired of *Masjids*," because that would have been a disloyalty to the Jama Masjid.

The fort was six hundred years old, and was the birthplace of the last Peshwa Boja. From its warm brown crenellated walls the view over the plateau was beautiful in the serene light. It was a country of many lakes and hillocks, and in the distance the hills rose against the pale, clear sky. The jail was enclosed within the fort, with a compound in the centre full of light and sunshine. The prisoners were ranged out in rows for our inspection. They had healthy, well-nourished faces, and their expression was more foolish than criminal.

"They are nearly all murderers," one of the soldiers said complacently.

Outside the courtyard their work was on sale : brightly striped dhurries and prayer-mats. While our purchases were being packed into the cars we went to the women's quarters. There were only two female prisoners. One came forward with a loud challenging manner and began to scream out a terrible story of injustice. Her companion drew her back and touched her forehead, to indicate that she was not responsible for her actions or her words. She continued to scream and

sob, however, and to implore us to help her to escape. It was a painful scene.

"Is she also a murderer?" I asked.

"She killed her child twenty years ago. She had two children, and she keeps asking to see the other one who is left."

"Twenty years is a long time, and the child is a man now, I suppose. She must have been quite a young girl when she committed the murder."

"She was a very young girl."

"The man in the courtyard who murdered his employer has only a six years' sentence. Is it worse to kill your child than another man?"

"Do you not think so? Besides, she is mad."

"I would hang the man and put that poor creature where she couldn't harm either herself or anyone else."

"Where is that?"

"In sleep."

"I am a Brahmin. I may not take life," he answered simply.

I looked at his pale face and beautifully chiselled features. He had a gentle arrogance and seeming detachment from the common affairs of life.

"Do you eat meat, Miss Sahib?" he asked politely.

"Yes. I don't like it much, but I do eat it."

"Why do you eat meat if you don't like it?"

"I think I should be hungry if I didn't."

"It is not necessary. I eat vegetables and fruit and I drink a little milk. I eat twice in the day. One should not eat too much."

We had reached the stables of the fort and were examining the State bullocks. One of the animals had a curious twist in its tail. "Why has it got a tail like that?"

"One time it was disobedient, and they twisted the tail until the animal did what it was told."

"They broke its tail, in fact. If you had been passing, and found the animal suffering acutely with a broken tail, or a broken leg, your religion would not have allowed you to put an end to its suffering by killing it?"

"No, Miss Sahib." Before the intense finality of his quiet voice there was nothing to be said, and I turned to join the others by the cars.

The Temple of Kāli was built upon a hill that rose out of the plateau beside one of the tanks that watered the country. A long flight of steep stone steps had been cut in the hillside. The steps were wide and high, and for anyone possessed of neither long legs nor a long breath the ascent must have been an ungainly stumble up the altar steps of God. The Dewan was explaining that once the temple had been the scene of frequent sacrifices of goats to the dread Kāli, whose propitiation is necessary to man, but that now such practices were no more, and the symbol had taken the place of the actual spilling of blood.

The presence of the Dewan made it unnecessary for us to remove our shoes, and with the defiling soles of our British leather we clambered up to the holy of holies.

The evening air from the plateau blew up cool and fragrant, and mingled with the incense of dust and spices. The temple was small, bare, and unimposing. The priest left his prayers and came forward. In his hand he held a small silver tray, into which we solemnly put two fingers. He retreated, and returned with another tray that held a thick scarlet substance, and, pausing before each in turn, he traced, with a touch as light as if a bird's feather had brushed our faces, in the middle of the brow a small scarlet circle as perfect as Giotto's. We had received the tilka, the Hindu caste mark.

"You are initiated," the Dewan said playfully ; "you have become a Hindu, Miss Farmer."

"I am truly sensible of the honour," I replied. But as I descended the steep stone steps I was thinking uneasily, not of the eye of God, but of Farman Shah's one, that observed more than most people's two, and of how impossible it would be, when the car stopped before the palace, for me to conceal my face.

It was dark before we reached the city, and the road was

thronged with bullock-carts and tongas. Somehow our car managed to lose sight of the first car, in which the Dewan sat, and, instead of following him back along the road that skirted the city and led straight to the open country and the palace on the other side of the bazaar, and the houses, we found ourselves taking the road to the heart of the city.

On a large piece of waste ground just outside the city, two hundred and forty *sadhus* sat cross-legged. They sat under the shelter of black cotton umbrellas, beside small wood fires. They wore grey suits made of a paste mixed with smearings of ash—fortunately, the brief cold weather was over—and some wore crimson sashes, and others had dressed their hair in a large bun over the left ear. They were professional *sadhus* on a pilgrimage to the holy city of Ujjain.

The car was held up by a tonga on one side and a bullock-cart on the other. We had a full and prolonged view of the holy men, the black cotton umbrellas, and the wood smoke from their fires. Both my companions were British, and the crimson sashes, chignons, and ash suitings made it impossible for me to take a serious view of the *sadhus*.

"They are more like a circus than a monastery," I said.

"Yes ; look at that one who has painted his face in red and white stripes. Isn't he the image of 'Whimiscal Walker,' the clown?"

"All the same, Miss Farmer," my second companion suggested mildly, "I don't think I should laugh quite so much, if I were you."

I drew my head back into the car "But they have seen my tilka, and will believe that I'm a Hindu."

"I fear it is hardly an adequate disguise."

Before the *sadhus* had time to forget their sanctity in avenging my levity, the bullock-cart moved out of our way and the car sped on through the gathering darkness into the city. Presently it turned into a narrow alley of small, open mud huts raised above the level of the road. The huts were lighted by *buttis*, and the people were still at work making

large, round, open baskets. I am charmed by all baskets, big and little, and these would have been perfect for weeding purposes, but I had a vision of three terriers asleep in one before a hot fire. To the amazement of the chauffeur, the car was told to stop and he was asked to choose a basket.

I was fumbling with rupees in my bag when the basket was handed into the car. "How much?"

"Two annas, three pice, Miss Sahib."

I would have given the man eight annas if I could have found it, but in the darkness I could only find a four-anna piece. I handed it out, but to my surprise it was received with great disfavour.

"What is the matter? Isn't it enough?"

"Have you got single annas, Miss Sahib? The man he no like a four-anna piece."

"Why wouldn't he take my four-anna piece?" I asked, when the car was once again in motion. "I thought he'd be pleased. I gave him nearly twice what he asked."

"If you went, as a stranger, to a village in England and offered a small shop a five-pound note, the man would be reluctant to take it; first, because he would be suspicious in case it was a forged one, and secondly, because he would have difficulty in circulating it. A five-pound note in a village is an encumbrance."

"But you can't possibly compare a four-anna piece with a five-pound note."

"I don't say that the relative value is exactly the same to that peasant. But I do say that it is very much more than you have any idea of."

I was still thoughtfully hugging my basket when the car stopped at the palace. Farman Shah was not among the group of servants by the entrance, but he came to meet me across the courtyard. As he took my basket, I knew that the tilka had not escaped his notice.

"I have become a Hindu," I said defiantly.

"I see, Miss Sahib," he replied quietly, and smiled.

But a few moments later he appeared at the bathroom

door. "Bath ready, Miss Sahib. And I've put hot water in the basin also, and your *fiece* towel and sponge are ready."

If the Dewan and four Rajas had not been dining with us, I might have been tempted to leave the tilka on my forehead, as its flawless scarlet arch delighted me more than any lipstick, but, as it was, I took the hint about the *fiece* towel.

I sat at dinner by the oldest Raja, whose dark eyes had a sombre light that was pathetic. As we walked into the dining-room, a whisper reached me: "Be kind to him. Poor thing, he is melancholic at times."

I sat on his right hand, and conversation was difficult; and there was an unnecessary array of cutlery, and in the long pauses of our talk he bent his sad eyes on the tablecloth and played with the knives in an absent-minded manner. On my other side sat the youngest Raja, who was as gay and talkative as the other was morose. He told me that he had three daughters and one son, and that he was passionately fond of music and tennis. He laughed a great deal, and, as the table was enormous and his seat was far from mine, it was not always easy to hear what he said.

All the time that we were speaking, the old Raja sat in silence. I was conscious that when I talked to his nephew I was obliged to turn my back on him, and that did not seem to be kind, to say nothing of the fact that I could not then watch the progress of the knives. It was not an easy dinner, and I was glad when we all withdrew to the drawing-room and I could sink into a plush seat beside the Dewan.

The seats were arranged in a semicircle round the room, and when the coffee-cups had been removed the musicians appeared from an ante-room. One of the musicians had to be supported into the room. Owing to his great age, he had retired into private life, but to-night he had returned to play his swan song in our honour. The musicians sat cross-legged on the floor, with curious box-like instruments in front of them. The singer, a grand professional from Bombay, who

wore a bright pink puggari and whose nose was long and thin, sat in front of the others. He had a slight cast in one eye, and he made the most extraordinary contortions of his body while he was singing. His voice was nasal and shrill, and when he reached a particularly high note he stuck there and seemed incapable of leaving it. It was my first introduction to Indian music, and it was unfortunate that the onslaught should have been so violent, as on other occasions, in its gentler manifestations, I found I was able to enjoy it.

I tried not to remember the *sadhus* under their umbrellas, nor the other occasions, usually in some small remote Presbyterian church, upon which I had met defeat; I diverted my attention to the fact that it was a family failing, and one for which I was therefore not responsible. I thought of the little church in the Lake District in whose graveyard there is a gateway that testifies in verse to the fact that there my great-great-grandfather laughed. It was not a sobering memory, and when the song ended I wiped my eyes furtively.

The Dewan turned sympathetically. "You are affected by music?"

"Yes, Dewan Sahib, I am."

"Then we shall have something gay. It will not do to make our guests sad."

The professional from Bombay sang his gay song, and then he proceeded to sing it over again in English. The words of the English version were almost as unintelligible as the Indian had been; all except the refrain, and that was repeated over and over again.

"Buck up, buck up for Bombay!" shrieked the thin-nosed professional, shaking himself in his efforts to reach his high notes. His words rang like a clarion-call through the drawing-room. Unfortunately, his pronunciation was less pure than were his intentions, and the Dewan was very agitated.

"It will not be all right. He will say something he

shouldn't," he kept murmuring, in an agony. "Are you sure it is all right what he is saying?"

"Quite all right," we replied, in gasps, between our laughter.

After the noisy exhortation to haste, it was a relief to listen to the youngest Raja, who rose rather reluctantly to oblige us with a song. He had a round face and twinkling humorous eyes, and his voice, or what was audible of it, was low and sweet. Unfortunately, however, he neglected the elementary duty of opening his mouth, and therefore the sound was almost entirely lost.

"Why doesn't he sing louder? He doesn't open his mouth enough."

"He is unable to do so. His mouth is full of *pān*."

"But why does he try to sing if his mouth is crammed with *pān*?"

"It is Indian fashion." The reply was quiet and final. It was a case of Farman Shah's shirt over again.

After the Rajas had gone out to their cars, the Dewan lingered to see that we had everything for our comfort. The bearers had gathered round for the final orders of the night.

"If you are hungry or thirsty, you have only to ask; the servants will get you what you want," the Dewan said. "And there are guards round the palace, if you have any fear. But the guards are there not because they are necessary. Sleep with doors and windows open. You are safe here; no one will touch you. You are not in British India."

We murmured our thanks and turned towards our rooms.

As we crossed the tiled courtyard under a dark sky that sparkled with large, imperious stars, I was told to be sure that there was soda-water in my room. Before I could answer, a voice out of the darkness spoke.

"Miss Sahib no like soda-water."

The night and the cactus-trees hid my 'affront.' But, to my astonishment, on entering my room, on the table by my bedside there stood a tall bottle of Evian water

with the seal still unbroken. I looked round at the high doors, the net curtains by the window, and the sofa upholstered in blue. It was many thousands of miles from France, and I was staying in the palace of an Indian prince, but at that moment it was hard to believe that I was not in a French hotel bedroom.

I undressed, put out the light, and, pushing open the windows, I leant out into the night. There was a light above the sentry-box on my left, which illuminated the compound, but the guard stood still as a toy soldier at his post—asleep perhaps, like a horse, as he stood. Not a sound broke the stillness. The night was full of the awful silence of the country when man and beast alike are asleep, and only nature seems to brood over the eternal, inexplicable relation of the Absolute in the finite, and the finite in the Absolute.

I looked from the motionless figure of the guard to the still, dark trees behind the ruined temple, and up to the sky full of hard, uninterested stars. There was movement nowhere ; not even a leaf trembled. Yet, had the guard yawned or coughed, it would have made no difference. I should not have been certain even then that the whole had any existence beyond my imagination. That sense of illusion that used to come suddenly—I knew the mood well. It was a horrified sense of :

“ There is no reality anywhere. I have imagined it all. I think the world, and therefore it is ; but actually there is nothing ; it’s all illusion. There is no real world.”

I turned from the window, shivering. What was the use ? I was imprisoned in the flesh, and, being unable to get outside myself, I could not discover whether there was any reality in the cosmos.

I clambered under the mosquito-nets and into the bed, which stood in the centre of the room. The light from the sentry’s *butti* fell across my face. There was no illusion about that. I left the bed, and, taking my coats and dresses out of the wardrobe, I hung them in a row along the rod of the

mosquito-curtains between me and the windows. Then I crept back into the dark hut that I had contrived, and lay down.

It seemed only a moment later that I opened my eyes, to find the room flooded with sunshine and Farman Shah standing by the bed, a tray of *chota hasri* in his hand, gazing spellbound at the row of coats.

CHAPTER V

THE CITY OF JOY

FROM ITS EARLIEST DAYS its surroundings have been associated with a legend of gaiety, and in A.D. 1406 Mandū was renamed Shādiābād, the City of Joy. Owing to its unique natural defences there must always have been a fortress of sorts there, even in those misty, far-off days when the Aryans first brought their bright gods to flourish in the soil of Hindustan. While the Upanishads were being written, no doubt Hindus were loving and dreaming in the care-free atmosphere of the joyous city. Nothing is known for certain, however, prior to the rule of the Paramaras (eighth to thirteenth centuries A.D.), and history in its accepted sense is said to begin with the governorship of Dilāwar Khan in the year A.D. 1401.

Mandū stands over 2,000 feet above the level of the sea, on a spur of the Vindhyan Range, separated from the plateau by a deep ravine. A small tongue of land like an isthmus darts out from the main plateau, joining it to the tableland of Mandū. On three sides it is encircled by the Kākra Koh, a tortuous gorge that winds round Mandū until it finally merges into the plain 1,200 feet below the southern side of the fort. The area of the hill-top extends over 12,000 acres, and is full of lakes, and rich in trees and vegetation. The names of many emperors and great men are associated with the fort, but to the ordinary mind those of Jehangir, Bāz Bahādur, and Akbar seem to linger in the memory. And if the question were asked : "What do you know of Mandū?" the answer would invariably be : "Rūpmatī lived and loved there."

The Englishmen were returning to their duties, and we watched the dust of their cars disappear between the vivid beds of poinsettias in the glare of the palace gardens before we made ready for our own departure. The servants and the luggage had gone on in the morning. Already the bedrooms had a deserted air. A Kashmiri bag of books, a camera, glare-glasses, and the dregs of Evian water in a tall bottle alone remained as witness of my occupancy. The room was beginning to return impersonally upon itself.

Three cars, to take four Englishwomen, one Prime Minister, one professor, two *khidmutgars*, and a picnic-basket, waited outside the palace.

The road went through lovely country, past the fields of sleep, where the pink and white heads of the opium poppy stood entranced at their own imagined beauty. Over streams it went, and through woods, where tall trees and thick undergrowth half hid the ruined tombs of men who died long ago in some dark struggle to take or hold Mandū. Above the Kākra Koh, the cars stopped. A small hut by the roadside was the home of a holy man who gave his life to prayer for the State. He believed, no doubt, that he would have his reward in his next life, if he were not sufficiently recompensed in this ; though for myself the view of that deep encircling ravine for ever at my door would be almost payment in full, if I could be certain that in identifying myself with the truth in nature I should ever remember my duty to the State.

The *khidmutgars* brought the seats from the cars, and laid them on the summit of the slope of grey rock that gently fell hundreds of feet down into the ravine. We sat under the shade of some young tamarisk-trees, while the servants, aided by the Dewan and the professor, unpacked. The wonder of the scene touched us, and we sat silent on our white cushions, leaving the men to fuss Martha-wise over the tea. But, when tea and sandwiches had been handed round, it was found that there was no milk. The Dewan

was consternated. This party was to have been perfect ; there were to have been two nights and two days of pure happiness for us all. And now, on the eve of it, there was no milk, and the party was spoilt. It was the fault, of course, of the head *khidmutgar*. He was in charge of the *banderbast*, and, before leaving with the rest of the servants, he ought to have seen to the tea. The two young *khidmutgars* looked at each other in horror. Tragedy trembled in the air, and, after a service to the State of nearly twenty years, the man's fate was in the balance.

"Now, Dewan Sahib, listen. We don't care a bit. What does it matter whether we have milk or not ? It's the place we've come for—nothing else. Promise, now promise, you won't sack that poor man."

"Well," said the Dewan, but there was no promise in his voice.

It was then that Clare rose up and walked over to the basket. She fumbled among the paper at the bottom with her neat, capable hands. Then quietly she lifted a large corked bottle of milk. "I'd had a feeling that it was there all the time," she said.

The servants chattered and smiled, the Dewan sat down, the party was retrieved from ruin, and the *khidmutgar's* family from ultimate starvation.

We entered Mandū past the Sweeper's Gate, where legend said that a sweeper was immured as sacrifice to appease the gods, when the gateway was built. To this day the villagers believe the tale, and point to a stone in the wall behind which they believe that the bones of the unfortunate man still moulder. The ascent to the Delhi Gate is by steep, wide steps, and once it was the way by which the elephants carried visitors. The road to-day makes a detour, and winds upward between banks of trees, bringing one into the fort behind the elephant-way of the Delhi Gate.

At the other side of Mandū were Rūpmati's pavilions, and thither the cars sped through a winding road on either side of which the jungle seemed to press.

Beyond the palace of Bāz Bahādur the road wound sharply up to the pavilions, which stood on the edge of the tableland. It is possible that the buildings were originally intended as look-out places, as, from their position on the edge of the hill that falls more than 1,000 feet down into the plain, they commanded a magnificent view of the movements of the enemy. It is also maintained that they are of later date than that of Bāz Bahādur. Be that as it may, the name of Rūpmatī is indissolubly associated with them, and man, probably wisely preferring legend to hard fact, has decided that they were built by Bāz Bahādur for his favourite wife.

Poor clay-cold Rūpmatī—like many another, she must be forgiven much because she loved much. Her chief fault seems to have been that not only did she count the universe well lost for love, but that she lost her sense of humour into the bargain. If, however, woman in her loves could preserve her sense of proportion, much of history would have to be re-written. But as we seem incapable, as a sex, of that, there is no use blaming Rūpmatī; for not only was she a woman and a lover, but she was also a highbrow and a writer, and that kind seem to get it worse than others.

One day, Bāz Bahādur was hunting in the forest bordering the right bank of the River Narbada. He had outridden his retinue, and was alone. Suddenly he was startled to hear a flow of exquisite song coming from the direction of a clump of tall trees. Following the sound, he came upon a young Hindu girl sitting under a bargat-tree, singing loudly to the woods, the deer, and the birds, who were listening in astonishment to her song. Her beauty matched her voice, and, when they spoke, Bāz Bahādur found that her conversation was a worthy complement of both. He loved her from that moment, and besought her to be his.

“When the Narbada flows through the City of Joy, I will be your bride, but not till then,” she replied archly.

Bāz Bahādur returned, determined that the forces of nature should be subjugated to the voice of love. Summoning his kingdom to work, axe in hand he strove to turn the river up the steep side of the hill. The river-god, overcome by the strength of such a love, appeared in the form of a giant, who told Bāz Bahādur to desist in his endeavours, but to return to his own land, search for a sacred tamarisk, dig under its roots, and there a stream would be found which, being a tributary of the Narbada, was part of its sacred flow.

The king found the tamarisk, dug underneath till he came to the spring, made the reservoir the Rewa Kund, beside it built his palace, and then went in search of Rūpmatī.

At first Rūpmatī was very happy. She divided her time between writing poetry and making love to her husband, whom every day she adored more deeply. Bāz Bahādur neglected his office of kingship for her sake, and his concubines wandered disconsolate about their apartments, since he no longer cared to see them. Every day the lovers went out riding through Mandū, alone among the trees and by the lakes, and Rūpmatī poured forth her love in constant song and poem.

No doubt it was all rather exhausting for Bāz Bahādur. Besides, however deeply he might love his wife, he was of his time and his place, and anything as eccentric as entire conjugal fidelity would have shocked his subjects. The time came when he turned to his other wives and his concubines, and Rūpmatī, alone in her apartments, beat her breast, and the bitterness of death was in her soul. More than ever she turned to her poetry to ease the pain of frustration and jealousy, but the very proximity in the palace to those other women was horrible to her. Then it was that she longed for some refuge where she might at least enjoy the solitude of remembering her love. One day, when she was out riding, she came upon the mill-top overlooking the plain, from where she could see faintly, like a ribbon, the

far-distant river of her childhood. There she built her pavilions, and there she lived with her music and her writing and her sad thoughts of love.

Sometimes at night, when Bāz Bahādur was surrounded by his women and his court, in the middle of the drunken revelry the sound of a voice singing reached him from the hill-top above. He would put down his cup of wine and listen, and the thought of Rūpmatī and her love would quicken his blood, and, pushing aside the painted women at his feet, he would leap on to his horse and ride up the hillside to where that voice awaited him. In the hours that followed, the bitterness would leave Rūpmatī's heart, and she only remembered that the man in her arms was the one being on earth whom she loved.

The depth and sincerity of her love have survived the ages and fired the imagination of man, immortalising the famous lovers in poetry, in painting, and in legend. Possibly the high state of culture that prevailed in Mandū may have hastened their downfall. Akbar, taking advantage of stories he had heard of the king's pre-occupation with the arts, sent an expedition against the fort. It was successful, and the king was obliged to fly in haste, leaving his treasures and his wives to fall into the enemy's hands. Rūpmatī, rather than become a victim to the stranger's pleasure, poisoned herself in the hour that she was summoned to the presence of the Moghul general, Adham Khan, this fitly ending a life that had dramatised all existence into the emotions of love or poetry.

From the parapets of the pavilions we sat and looked down into the plain. Behind the pavilions the hills and jungle of Mandū darkened as the sun sank in the sky. In front, the plain lay, like a gigantic green lake, 1,200 feet below the parapets. A distant glimmer of silver was the River Narbada. Across the plain a blue ridge of mountain edged the horizon, and slowly turned to violet as the sun set.

The Dewan, in his pink Mahratta hat and white coat

and white jodhpurs, reclined against the grey wall of a kiosk, looking thoughtfully across the plain. At a respectful distance, the professor stood with clasped hands. He stood out of deference to the office of the Dewan, who was also his cousin. His attitude was irritating, for not only was it an exhausting one, and such formality seemed ridiculous to our democratic common sense, but also, his stalwart figure in its European clothes was out of keeping with the kiosks of Rūpmatī's pavilions.

We sat, in a stillness that was almost unearthly, until the sun sank below the horizon, and the cool evening air came up from the plain to touch our faces. It is said that no one who has watched the sunset from Rūpmatī's pavilions is ever quite the same again. I do not think that that is the case. It is, rather, that no man who has ever lingered in Mandū is without defence. He has acquired a secret place, a refuge against the violation of modern fret and responsibility. On the way to the board-meeting, the dentist's chair, or in the face of anxiety or despair, he has only to return in spirit to the City of Joy, and, temporarily, he is safe. This earth is sweet to us, not only because of its human associations, but the very stones themselves are lovable. If the spirit released at death from the chains that fetter it in life could have liberty to roam the world, mine would make straight for the ruined palaces and encircling jungle of that tableland that some benign force of nature once tossed out from the Vindhyan Range.

Past the ruins of Bāz Bahādur's palace, monkeys chattered among the trees. The light was fading quickly, and in the village some miles beyond, with its open mud huts and stir of human life, the *buttis* were being lit. It was strange to come upon this sudden oasis of humanity, in its silent surroundings of ruin and jungle, and to know that the only neighbours of these people were the wild beasts that teemed in the undergrowth, and the snakes that in the rainy season came out of their hiding-places and turned the City of Joy into a place of menace.

About a mile beyond the village stood the Chhappan Mahall, the tomb of an unknown noble. The tomb of red sandstone was built on a terrace raised thirteen feet above the ground. The hall of the mausoleum was about thirty-two feet square and was entered by an arched doorway. Above the squinches of the corners was a band of ornamental arches set with Pathan blue tiles. Round the rim of the dome was a frieze of fine carving. The hall had four entrances, the south being for the guests who were to use the tomb as their dining-room, and the north for the servants, beyond which the kitchen and pantry tents for the cook and *khidmutgars* had been erected. At the western end of the terrace a small bungalow, consisting of two rooms and two bathrooms, had been made for the use of archæologists or visitors.

Down in the open ground before the terrace an encampment of tents turned the clearance into a miniature Salisbury Plain. Here the Dewan, the professor, the professor's assistant, and the servants were to sleep. The strength of the camp comprised four Englishwomen, one Prime Minister, one professor, one assistant ditto, six personal servants, and forty-eight other servants, including cooks, *khidmutgars*, sweepers, water-carriers, and sentries.

Lights were swinging from poles on the terraces, the encampment below hummed with life ; as we climbed the steps at the east side of the terrace, we saw the palace *khidmutgars* hurrying to and fro with basket-chairs and trays of lemonade. The three bearers came to meet us, to take our coats. Farman Shah's hands were shaking with excitement, and Swami, the privileged, said hoarsely : " This is first-class *banderbast*, Miss Sahib."

On the north-east corner of the terrace, parallel with the end of the bungalow, in the open space between the end of the terrace and the corner of the mausoleum, a large tent was pitched. It was divided into two bathrooms, a dressing-room, and a bedroom. The bedroom was in front, behind

a projection of canvas that formed a verandah, and its walls were hung with yellow and red chintz in the Persian pineapple design. There were tables and easy chairs, vases of flowers, and two beds hung with white mosquito-nets.

Clare and I looked round the tent, and then out beyond the sandstone wall of the unknown nobleman's tomb to where the night was creeping from the jungle over the edge of the terrace.

"Bearers have good tent too, Miss Sahib," Farman Shah said. "It's at the other side of kitchen tent. And they are saying all these buildings are built by Muslims, in long ago Pathan days."

"And they are saying, also, that the tomb is haunted. Did you hear that?"

"Yes, Miss Sahib, the spirit no likes anyone to be there all night. But it will not hurt Miss Sahibs. Miss Sahibs only eat there."

Outside, on the terrace, we sat and sipped lemonade. The camp stirred and murmured with life, but beyond, encompassing us on all sides, was the silence of the jungle. The moon had risen and the stars were out, and the dark sides of the nobleman's tomb looked strange and alien, as if it resented our intrusion.

It was hard to turn back to the tent to hot baths and dressing for dinner. The tales of the white man alone in the jungle meticulously donning a nightly stiff shirt, I have always listened to with derision. But we were not alone, and we wore our evening dresses out of respect to the Dewan. Therefore, though I can for ever boast that I have slept in the jungle, I am no nearer knowing the truth about the Englishman and his habits.

When I emerged from the dressing-room, Farman Shah stood between the beds, and the brightness of his face was dimmed. "Miss Sahib, there is no bazaar."

"Well, did you expect shops and a cinema in the jungle?" I spoke sharply, having no sympathy with those

who look for roundabouts and fortune-tellers in the Elysian fields.

"I do not want shops and cinemas. I want food. I have not eaten since my *roti khana*."

The dignity of his reproach included the fact that I had eaten twice since noon, and was about to do so for a third time.

"Oh, don't worry about that. There'll be plenty of food for all of us in the camp. If they provide roses in the jungle, they won't forget to give us food."

"There is food for Miss Sahib, but no for bearers."

"Oh, you people ! There is food everywhere, given by Hindus, cooked by Hindus, served by Hindus, and you won't touch it !"

"There is no *banderbast* for us," he replied doggedly.

"I am sure you are wrong. You will go to Memsahib ; she will know. But, if there isn't there's a slab of chocolate and a packet of biscuits in my suitcase. Will you condescend to eat my food ?"

He smiled. "You are very kind, Miss Sahib."

In the end, of course, there was a *banderbast* for the bearers. Swami said that they had a first-class supper, and Abdul Rahim, under pressure from Memsahib, admitted that on arrival at the tomb the bearers had filled their tins with tea and had had a nice long hot drink. Abdul Rahim may have had a less poetic mind, but at least it was accurate. As I was leaving the tent to go to dinner, I said :

"Will you eat your supper with Swami ?"

"No, Miss Sahib. Abdul Rahim will eat with me, but not Swami."

"But there is only one tent for the three of you. Are you going to make Swami sleep out in the cold ?"

He looked surprised. "No, Miss Sahib. Swami, he sleep with us. Plenty of room for three in tent."

I replied : "I am glad to hear that." But, as I walked towards the southern side of the terrace, I was thinking

of the diversity of opinion in the human race. Provided he were clean, there was no one in the world with whom I would object to eat, whereas there were remarkably few people, even of my own family, with whom I would choose to sleep.

CHAPTER VI

I CAME TO THE SORROWLESS LAND

A LONG TABLE covered with a white cloth stood in the centre of the sepulchral hall of the tomb. On either side there were high-backed carved chairs, and in the middle of the table a large silver bowl full of roses. The flickering lights from the *buttis* cast long strange shadows, and the white-coated palace servants moved noiselessly to and fro on their hard bare feet. The Dewan had changed his pink hat for one of pale mauve, and he had put on a long dark-blue cloth coat against the chill of night.

To eat a six-course dinner in the jungle was fantastic enough, but to have it served in the tomb of an unknown Muslim nobleman, apart from its being a haunted tomb, was as if one were transported out of everyday life into a dream. A faint pricking at the back of the neck—imagination of course—as of an alien presence, and I wondered : “ Is it really haunted, as they say ? ”

We talked of ghosts and psychic experience, and the Dewan told the story of the soldier and the tomb. Some British soldiers were on duty there, and they had heard that the tomb resented any living presence after midnight. The soldiers’ tent was pitched out on the terrace—near where ours now stood. One, a subaltern of the usual rather stolid and unimaginative type, was unashamedly sceptical. Finding, however, that some of his companions were disposed to question whether there were not more things at least on earth, if not in heaven, than he was willing to admit, he determined to put the matter to the test. His bed was made up in the tomb, and, some time between eleven and

midnight, he said good night to his friends, and, alone, lay down to sleep.

In the dark hour before dawn a cry was heard, and the subaltern dashed out of the tomb and fled ignominiously to his friends. His self-defence was weak, nor was the explanation satisfactory. All he could say was that something, and it was more like a cold wind than a presence, had come across the tomb and had driven him out. It was not so much that he had panicked, but that simply he had had to go. The Indians accepted the story with a shrug and the implication that in effect it would teach scoffers not to sleep in haunted tombs.

The Dewan turned to the head *khidmutgar* for corroboration. The man agreed that it was as the Dewan Sahib had said : he remembered the episode vividly. I looked up at the dark corners of the hall where, in the dim light, the blue Pathan tiles were just visible.

"Perhaps it is only an alien and unsympathetic presence that the tomb resents? If the subaltern had been different, the tomb might have been less inhospitable."

Across the table, my friend smiled. "I believe you would like to sleep here yourself."

"Miss Sahib would not dare," the Dewan said hastily.

"Not alone, but with someone else—no, two other people—I'd do it." I looked at Clare. I could count on her, I knew. I turned to Miss James, but she was eating nuts out of a silver dish.

Nothing more was said, and, a few moments later, we left the tomb and went to sit out on the terrace.

Deck-chairs had been arranged on a dhurrie at the south-west corner of the terrace. A light swung on a pole at either end at the top of the two flights of steps. The open doorway framed the lighted tomb, and in the camp below there were flickering *buttis*. Beyond the circle of light and life, the night and the jungle pressed closely. There was a brilliantly clear sky above our heads, but the air was keen

and we were glad to wrap rugs round our knees, to turn up the collars of our coats over our thin dresses.

Presently, three men from the village a mile away, and a little boy, came and squatted on the dhurrie at our feet. They had brought their weird instruments with them, and the child sang in a high, clear treble. The boy's two uncles played on the instruments, and the third man, an immobile friend wearing a scarlet puggari, squatted silently in the background.

When the child's song was ended, he sat with his hands folded quietly in his lap, gazing with grave eyes up at the stars. One of the uncles sang to his own accompaniment.

"He is singing," the Dewan said, "that God is unfathomable. Do you also believe that God is unfathomable, Miss Sahib? God is everywhere, yet unfathomable. These monks and nuns who give their lives to searching for him, they know him no more than we do. Thought gives us imperfect pictures of reality, but it is also incapable of reaching reality. It is only when thought is perfected in intuition that we can know the real. The man who thinks that he does not know the Absolute, does so—though imperfectly. And the man who believes that he does know the Absolute, does not do so completely. It is unknown to those who know, and known to those who do not know."

The uncle of the little boy sang another song. The Dewan translated the words. "Sacrifice is never without motive. The world is ruled by action."

"He earns six annas a month for playing at the Rām God Temple. He is quite happy. The less a man knows or has, in one sense, the happier he is. But, now that he knows the world is ruled by action, he may not be happy any longer."

The light from the *butti* fell upon the faces of the musicians. The child and the friend sat motionless, only the uncles sang on, their voices rising and falling in the cool night air. The bearers squatted by the entrance to the tomb. The servants had gone to bed in the camp; beyond the terrace there was silence, and the night.

This was India. I was possessed by a strange, almost mystical sense of unity with these people, a sudden realisation of the fundamental oneness of the world. The Dewan looked at me and smiled. Perhaps he had read my thoughts. I continued to sit as still as the child in front of me, and I looked out into the night with eyes that were suddenly unseeing.

It is impossible to describe, to one who has never seen, the colours of the spectrum, nor the sea to those who have lived always inland. The intuitive insight is inarticulate, and it is impossible to give a formal, objective description to such experience. It is incommunicable, and any metaphor that is used to explain it sounds cold and unreal, simply because the full light of the real is too strong for our weak eyes. It is the case when the seer and the seen have become one ; the Absolute and the relative are no longer separated but have become one. In it all aspirations, desires, and thoughts are realised. It is the goal of man's personal life.

Like all great moments, it came upon me unsought, and, at the time, I did not recognise it for what it was worth. I only knew that, as I sat still and relaxed in my deck-chair, I was no longer conscious of my physical self ; both the bodily and the empirical selves were, through the transcendent, merged into the Absolute self, and temporarily, the I in me was dead. I, as far as I can still be said to be I, was only aware of unity. I was one with the people round me, with the night and the jungle, and, through that and beyond that, with the cosmic force. It is for such moments as this that we live. The unconscious craving for unity, for that death of self which is both life and liberation, constitutes the impulse and the motive behind all our actions. The release comes to some through work, through art, and through institutional religion. Most men find its physical counterpart in love, and believe that there the search is ended. The weak-willed and the neurotic seek frenziedly in lust, vice, and drugs, not knowing that they are daily burying the self deeper in the deathly prison of the ego. But, whether it be the artist, the

saint, or the opium-eater, all are struggling from the unreal to the real, from death to immortality—to that central reality which is infinite existence, truth, and absolute happiness. That ecstatic moment when the seer, the sight, and the seen become one is the termination and the culmination. The quest is ended, and there is nothing further to seek or know.

Whether such experience is ever repeated in the life of an ordinary mortal, I know not. Doubtless it is the commonplace of the trained mystic. But whether it comes only once, or is repeated, is of little import. It has been, and the fact that it is incommunicable does not make it any less true, nor because it may never come again does it seem less important. The ultimate goal of the river is still the sea, even though the river may not know whither it is flowing, nor that its ultimate goal necessitates the loss of its state of being a river. For moments such as that are the beginning and the end, the cause and the effect, when the Absolute in all experience becomes itself the absolute. . . .

The little boy was getting shyly to his feet, obedient to a sign from memsahib. He came slowly to her, and held out his hands to receive some silver rupees to buy *mittie*. The musicians were dismissed, and, saying good night to the Dewan, we turned away from the terrace wall and walked slowly towards our sleeping apartments.

From various causes we were silent. Perhaps the others were tired ; it had been a long day and a strenuous one. I had no impulse to speak of my moment to anyone, not even to the friend whose kindness had been instrumental in bringing us to the City of Joy. She said good night, and, with Miss James, disappeared into the bungalow, leaving Clare and me to lower the *chicks* of our tent.

CHAPTER VII

THE HOLY MAN

EARLY NEXT MORNING the cars came to the foot of the terrace steps. The bearers, with sun-umbrellas and glare-glasses, stood holding open the doors.

"I should be glad," the Dewan said, "if Miss Farmer would accompany me in my car that we may discuss Hinduism together."

I thanked him, and turned to take my umbrella from Farman Shah, who gave me a black look. If he had come upon me drinking gin in the Peshawar Club at twelve o'clock in the morning, I should have felt that I had earned that look. But, in the circumstances, it was hardly merited, and I stepped into the car wondering what I had done to annoy him.

"Do you believe," the Dewan asked as the car drove out of the camp, "in equality, Miss Farmer?"

"No, I do not."

"And why do you not?"

"Because, I suppose, having no particular wish to believe in it, I don't twist facts to fit the case. There is not equality in animals; you may breed deliberately, going for some particular strain, trying to eliminate bad qualities, but you never know when they aren't going to appear again. I don't see that man is so very different in this respect. Take family life, for instance. The same parents may have four children, of whom one is brilliant, one beautiful, a third entirely uninteresting and commonplace, and the fourth may be a waster with criminal tendencies. There is no equality there. Yet all four are of the same parentage, brought up in the same environment."

“ Good,” said the Dewan. “ I agree with you. We Hindus do not believe in equality, though we may now and then compromise with the modern tendencies, and, on the surface, give way. But, fundamentally, we have not changed. In Hinduism there are four castes : the Brahmins, the scholars, representing authority ; the Ksatriyas, the warriors, the preservers of the State ; the Vaisyas, the merchants or the cultivators of the land ; and the Sudras, the servants. Did you know that, Miss Sahib ? ”

“ Yes, I knew that.”

“ What else do you know of Hinduism ? ”

“ Nothing ; nothing at all.” But, as I spoke, my eyes fell. I had no intention of telling the Dewan the rest of my limited knowledge of Hinduism. It was not what I could have repeated to anyone, least of all to a Hindu.

The Dewan replied : “ You have read a book or two, I imagine, and I expect I know which. But these books are not by Hindus. Why don’t you read some books by people who really know what they are writing about ? ”

“ Yes, I will,” I said hastily. “ You will give me the names, and I will read them.”

“ Do you believe in three Gods, Miss Sahib ? ”

“ No, I do not.”

“ Yet I think if I were to describe Christianity to an ordinary Hindu, he would imagine that you worshipped three gods. It is very difficult not to misjudge another man’s religion. We also have our trinity : Brahma, the creator ; Vishnu, the preserver ; Siva, the destroyer ; including, in these three, cognition, emotion, and will ; presenting the supreme spirit as omniscience, supreme love, and perfect will. Yet these are not their gods, but three aspects of one true God. I am a Hindu, and I worship only one God, even as you do. That surprises you, doesn’t it ? But if you were going to present Christianity to someone who had never heard of it, how would you do it ? Someone, I mean, of your own education and culture. Or shall I put it another way ? Surely Christianity, like all other spiritual manifestations, can only

be explained by man according to his own lights. It is again the old story of the blind men and the elephant. You know it, probably. The elephant was there, but all that the blind men could do was each to catch hold of the first part that came to hand—one his tail, another his trunk, and so on—and to describe what he felt.

“ Now, let us suppose that you were asked by a Hindu of education to tell him about Christianity, of which he knew nothing—it would be hard to find such a one, because educated Hindus know far more about Christianity than educated Christians do of Hinduism, but, for argument’s sake, we will let that pass. Now what would you tell him? Would you give him the beliefs expressed by the ignorant masses of Europe? ”

I thought of the crude plaster images of the Continent ; of Italian peasants weeping and slobbering in an ecstasy over the marble floor in front of a shrine at some saint’s festival ; and of a charming cabman in a little church out on the Campagna, who knocked over a chair, upset a case of flowers on the altar, and disturbed the prayers of a dozen people, in his holy zeal to point with a long varnished pole to “ an original Footstep ” in a glass frame. I thought of the empty unreality of certain parish churches wherein the bleating of the curates and the roast beef of conventionality valiantly strove to ignore the tremendously daring doctrines of the Gospels. And I remembered a large bell-tent on Southsea Common, in which one who called himself a judge conducted revival meetings, and men screamed “ Hallelujah ” and proclaimed their love of the Lord.

With shame I realised that, prior to my visit to India, I had looked upon the Hindus as heathens, and had listened to those who maintained that Hinduism, like a loathsome reptile, coiled its way over the sub-continent, poisoning the wells of life with its foul practices and dark beliefs. I had been content to accept the verdict of those who, having little or no knowledge of Western philosophy or mysticism, had denounced the wisdom of the East, reducing the accumulated

truth of centuries of thought and intuition to a handful of childish superstitions, savage fears, and gross symbols.

The Dewan looked at me searchingly. "Whatever a man is, so will his God appear to him to be. If you have all grades of Christianity in the West, from the superstition of a peasant to the sublimity of St. Francis, so have we all grades of Hinduism. 'The worshippers of the Absolute are the first in rank ; second to them are the worshippers of the personal God ; after that, the worshippers of the incarnations, Rama, Krisna, Buddha ; below them, those who worship the ancestors and sages and deities ; and lowest of all are the worshippers of the forces of nature.' "

The car stopped, and, as the Dewan held the door open, he added : " Although Hinduism has never doubted the reality of the one supreme universal spirit, yet, knowing that the ignorant peasant is incapable of understanding the Absolute, it has permitted the lowest elements to survive, even as a ladder has its lowest rungs, in order to make room for all. We rise from life to thought, Miss Farmer, always attaining to higher levels of reality."

The cars had stopped in a clearing near a gateway at the top of a flight of grey-stone steps leading down to the Nil Kanth Palace. The hillside sloped down into the ravine, and its sides were covered with trees. The silk cotton and the flame of the forest were in full bloom. The Dewan pointed to the latter.

" Look, the flame of the forest is out early this year. I don't know when I have seen such masses of bloom. When the flowers come like that, early, and as abundantly, it means that there will be a terrible hot season and much sickness. I am sorry to see this."

" You seem to dread your hot weather as much as we dread our winter."

" We have reason to. Our summer months are as long and as trying to us as your winter is to you."

The Nil Kanth is an epithet of the god Siva, and, centuries ago, it was a Hindu shrine, before a Mohammedan king

built a pleasure palace on its site. The Muslim building of red sandstone still stands, but once again it has fallen into Hindu hands, and the hall that echoed to the laughter of Jahangir's pretty ladies now listens to the prayers of a priest.

The Nīl Kanth stands in a clearing on the hillside, and over the tree-tops there is a view down into the ravine, across the valley, and up to the distant hills of the main range on the other side. Jahangir loved to visit the pleasure house, and he recorded the fact in his memoirs. "On the third day of Amurdad, with my palace ladies, I set out to see the Nīl Kanth, which is one of the pleasantest spots in the fort. Shāh Budāgh Khān, who was one of the trusted nobles of my august father, built this very pleasing and joy-giving lodge, during the time he held this province in fief (A.D. 1572-7). I remained at Nīl Kanth till about an hour after nightfall, and then returned to my state apartments."

There are several inscriptions carved on the walls commemorating the expeditions in the Deccan and to Khandesh of Jahangir's august father, Akbar, side by side with others that proclaim the mutability of earthly pomp and glory. In the inner arch of the main hall, the inscription is in Persian, and, having stated that Shāh Budāgh Khān built the palace, it continues in verse :

*The whole of life may well be spent in the handling of clay and water
That perchance the godly person may linger here awhile.*

Whether that pious sentiment actuated the work of Shāh Budāgh Khān, or whether he merely built to please his master with a joy-giving lodge, the words of the Persian poem had come to pass on the morning of our visit many centuries after they were carved on the sandstone archway.

In front of the main hall of the palace there is a court, with a cistern in the centre, to which water was supplied by a channel built along the plinth of the main apartments, which are raised about six feet above the court. Facing the palace there is a wall, and, at the west side, the flight of steps. The palace is built on three sides of the court,

On a level with the water and the east rooms of the palace, on the hillside above the north-east corner of the wall, a small hut had been built for the priest's accommodation. Outside the hut, seated cross-legged on the hill, was a godly person, lingering in prayer by the Nil Kanth.

This holy man in no way resembled the ash-covered Sadhus with the cotton umbrellas and crimson sashes. To begin with, he was fully dressed, and then, though his lips were never still, his prayers were inaudible. He sat facing the centre hall, where was the shrine, and it was not until the Dewan went up to him that he seemed aware of our presence.

He made a movement to indicate that he would bless the Dewan, but the Dewan turned and drew us forward. Generosity in spiritual matters is surely one of the most unexpected forms of unselfishness. The "Bless me also, O my father," is far oftener heard than the "Bless even these my friends, O my brother," of the Dewan.

The holy man held my hand with a touch as light as thistledown, and momentarily he looked into my eyes, and, as his lips moved in silent prayer for me, I felt as if he had seen all that was both good and bad in my heart.

There is a story told of a man who was obliged to undergo a serious operation. The surgeon warned the patient that there was a grave risk that he might not live through the operation, but that if it were not performed he would most assuredly die. The man received this verdict with the utmost indifference.

"I must admit," the surgeon was impelled to say, "you take this extraordinary coolly. Do you realise what I have had to tell you?"

"Yes," replied the man calmly. "I understand perfectly. You are telling me that I must face death, and I will tell you that I do so willingly. Some time ago I was as close as it is possible to be to death, and, before I was brought back, I saw a face. Now I am willing to go through death again, and not come back this time, on the bare chance that I may see that face again."

I saw the face of my holy man in the robust light of morning, when my powers were at their most vigorous. But the beauty of that man's expression—as if the flesh had worn to a mere thread and the spirit was there exposed for us to see—was remarkable to a degree that I would travel anywhere in the world for a mere chance to see it again.

The priest in charge of the shrine was also at prayer, but he was willing to talk to us, only stopping to place a drop of water on his tongue that the words of this world might be separated from the words of the other. His face was humorous rather than spiritual ; and, with a good deal of laughter, and as if it were a good joke rather than a theological fact, he embraced us all with a sweep of the arm, and said :

“ Six people, one spirit—all of God and from God.”

The shrine was decked with flowers, and there was much of the scarlet paper reminiscent of crackers that Hindus seem to patronise. In the centre of the hall there was a stone like an old-fashioned milestone, and one expected to see “ Canterbury 4 miles ” carved on its side. It was standing in what looked like a very large geometrical shape, not at all unlike the kind of thing in miniature that I used to make sand-pies in when a child.

“ What,” I asked lightly, “ is that ? ”

The Dewan looked very grave. “ That is our highest form of visible worship, and it represents the two substances of which the cosmos is formed—spirit and matter. In the world there is no spirit without matter, so is there no matter without spirit. These two elements pervade the cosmos, and the cosmos is of them.” He seemed to hesitate, then he added : “ The finite is, after all, but a shadow of the Absolute, a symbol, you might say, and in the finite we have a representation of the two substances ; and so in this world, among all living creatures, we find the two substances as male and female. Does—does that seem to you a very terrible belief ? ”

“ No,” I replied, before I turned to follow the others into the side room on the left. “ Put like that, I don't think it is at all terrible.”

As we climbed the stone steps back to the clearing where the cars waited, the Dewan said : " I don't know if you will be pleased or angry, but it is the truth, so you must accept it. In your last incarnation you were a Hindu."

I paused, at a loss for an answer, knowing that he meant this as the highest compliment. He replied, however, for me.

" You do not, perhaps, believe in reincarnation. But, since you do not believe in equality, don't you think that the world is ruled by injustice ? Does it compensate for a life of misery to be told that in the next world it will be made up to you ? Can the sufferings of a physical existence be recompensed for by the joys of a spiritual one ? "

" I don't think there is justice anywhere. I think that the whole scheme is much too vast to admit of anything as arbitrary as justice or injustice."

" That, Miss Sahib," the Dewan said politely, " is a remark devoid of all logic."

I laughed, and, as I stepped into the car, I had to check an impulse to ask the Dewan whether I had been a sweeper, a Sudra or a woman in my last incarnation. I was afraid that he would think me ribald, so, instead, I said that in the West men believed women to be incapable of logic.

" In India," he replied, " man believes that woman should be ' gentle of mind, bright of countenance, bearing heroes, honouring the gods, dispenser of joy.' "

" Is that the whole duty of a Hindu woman ? "

" It is not such a terrible one, after all, is it ? As you don't believe in equality, you should be glad that woman and man are assigned different places in the scheme, as you call it. In the Vishnu Purana there is a poem about it, and there you find the relative functions and attributes of the man and the woman. We are back again to the two substances that make up the whole.

" ' He is Vishnu, she is Shri,' " quoted the Dewan. " ' She is language, he is thought. She is prudence, he is law. He is author, she is work. He is patience, she is peace. He is will, she is wish. He is pity, she is gift. He is chant and she is note.

She is fuel, he is fire. She is glory, he is sun. She is orb and he is space. She is motion, he is wind. He is ocean, she is shore. He is owner, she is wealth. He is battle, she is might. He is lamp, she is light. He is day and she is night. He is tree and she is vine. He is music, she is words. He is justice, she is truth. He is channel, she is stream. He is flagstaff, she is flag. She is beauty, he is strength. She is body, he is soul.' "

It was after we had visited the Ashrafi Mahall and had crossed the road to Hoshang's Tomb and the Jami Masjid that we were joined by the professor's assistant. We walked through the enormous court that faced the Prayer Hall of the Jami Masjid, entering what seemed at first to be a forest of arches. The colonnade was divided into a series of bays by pillars running from east to west, from north to south. The ceiling was divided into fifty-eight domes, supported angularly by each pillar. The simplicity of the pillars and the sense of space and dignity gave an impression of great beauty and charm. The western wall of the mosque was divided into arches with sculptured heads, and jambs of polished black stone. The pulpit in the centre was of marble with heavily ornamented brackets and balustrades, more suggestive of an old Hindu temple than of a mosque.

In front of the pulpit and mihrab we paused, and the Dewan asked : " Do you admire this, Miss Sahib ? "

I replied that I admired it exceedingly, and that to my untutored mind the blending of the Hindu and Muslim styles only added to the interest.

" Then we shall give it to the assistant here. It shall be his, and no one will be allowed to enter without first asking his permission."

The eyes of the party turned upon the assistant, who looked down at his own shoes. A faint smile touched his lips, but he remained silent.

" Yes," continued the Dewan, " that will be the best way. The assistant shall have the Jami Masjid for himself. What do you think of someone who expects to have his church all to himself ? Don't you think it is selfish and outrageous and

altogether abominable that a man should keep other people out of his church ? ”

I looked from the Dewan to the assistant, who still continued to contemplate his shoes in silence. The smile had gone from his mouth. His thin, sensitive face was grave and rather stern. His respect for the office of the Dewan kept him silent.

“ Miss Sahib doesn’t understand. She doesn’t believe that because a man is a Brahmin he thinks he is too good to pray beside his fellows. But now that she does know, she will tell us what she thinks of such people.”

I laughed uneasily ; and, without looking at the Brahmin, I walked towards the north entrance of the Prayer Hall, where, in the road below, the cars were waiting to take us back to the Chhappan Mahall. I had learned several things about the Hindus that morning, and one of them was that it was possible to be orthodox and yet at the same time to laugh at the Brahmins, who were the highest caste.

In the late afternoon, when the sun was beginning to sink, and the shadows to lengthen, a picnic tea was spread in the Jahaz Mahall. A white dhurrie was laid on the stone floor of the square pavilion that projected out over the waters of the Munja Talão. White cushions were placed on the dhurrie, and the guests sat Indian fashion, eating cake and watching the reflections of palace and trees in the still waters of the lake.

The Ship Palace, as it is fittingly called, is surrounded on two sides by water, having a tank in front and a tank behind. It is supposed that Ghiyāth-ud-Dīn built the palace—that strange king who would touch no drop of wine, never missed his prayers, yet had a love and need of women that drove him to keep within his city fifteen thousand lovely creatures holding mock court appointments. At one time, “ five hundred beautiful young Turki females, dressed in uniform, armed with bows and quivers, stood at his right hand, and were called the Turki Guard. On his left were five hundred Abyssinian females, also in uniform, and carrying fire-arms.”

Besides his soldiers, he had dancers and teachers, women to read prayers, and women representing all the trades and professions. He housed his mock court in a building facing the side of the Kapur Talão, within a stone's throw from the Jahaz Mahall. Whatever truth there may be in his having built the Ship Palace, a strange atmosphere of happiness lingers in the ruined halls and pavilions, legacy, no doubt, of the days when women laughed and sang to please the love-crazed king.

Beyond the Ship Palace was the Hindola Mahall—most lovely of all the palaces—built at the end of the fifteenth century. In its strength and simplicity of style it is a contrast to the Jahaz Mahall, and in the quiet beauty of the audience hall there is a spacious serenity that recalls the peace that is found during vacation in the hall of an Oxford college.

At the Hindola Mahall the party divided, some going after panther, and others with the Dewan, to see the reflection of the Jahaz Mahall in the waters of the tank. From the crumbling stones of what was once the royal palace and the hot baths for the kings, we saw the reflected colours deepen as the sun sank lower and the outlines of the Mahall sharpened in the last hour before the light faded. But there was that about the atmosphere of the Jahaz Mahall that called us back.

From the terrace of the palace the view across the lake opened over the jungle and the Hill of Songarh. By mutual consent the party separated, each taking a lonely corner of a kiosk, or leaning against the wall of a pavilion, to watch for the sunset. The Dewan sat back against a grey-stone wall, his hands lightly dropping between his knees. One leg was bent up at the knee, and his foot was crossed. The East has retained the unconscious grace that the West has lost in its frantic race to catch the last omnibus before supper. Behind the white shoulders and pink Mahratta hat of the Dewan the sky slowly turned to blood-red. The ruined domes and turrets of the royal palaces were black against the violent Indian sunset, and the jungle, that began beyond the lake, seemed

to grow wilder and more beautiful as the sun sank below Songarh Hill and night came out of the trees at the other side of the Kapur Talão.

Miss James, Clare, and I had decided that we should like to sleep that night in the tomb of the unknown nobleman. From the beginning, Clare had been willing to lend security by her presence. Miss James had come round to my way of thinking, because her night in the bungalow had been disturbed by what she thought was the snarling of a wild beast underneath her window. At breakfast, when I came to describe our night in the tent, her suspicions were confirmed, and having had one night's sleep ruined by a beast, there seemed no reason why she should not try a tomb and a ghost by way of a change.

I only recount the occurrence in the night not because I think that it is important, or that it was in any way an extraordinary episode, but merely because it was the indirect cause of Miss James agreeing to try the tomb. We had been warned to keep the *chicks* of the tent down, and I chose, having an urban mind, to take the warning as a jest. The fauna of the plateau is apparently as rich and varied as its flora, and, though the tiger is not as frequent a visitor as he was in the days when Ferishta wrote his vivid descriptions, panthers patrol the roads at nights, while bears potter about the undergrowth, and monkeys leap from tree to tree.

Immediately upon putting out the light I fell asleep, that first night in the tent. Two hours later I awoke, and, in that moment before full consciousness returned, I was aware of a sound in the tent that made me question the workings of my companion's digestive system. Yet even as the thought came into my mind I woke up, and realised that the rumblings came from no human anatomy. Seizing the torch from under my pillow, I flashed it on. My mosquito-nets had come apart, and in the aperture, standing between the two beds, its head turned up towards mine, gazing at me with an interested and wholly ungenial look in its blazing eyes, was a small grey panther. From its throat issued that sound that had at first

seemed so innocent, but which now had power to send my heart clattering against my ribs.

I flashed my light, and in an instant the animal was gone. I woke Clare, who found her torch. Not being sure whether they did their hunting in couples, we felt obliged to search the tent, bathrooms, and dressing-room. All were empty. It was then necessary to advance and let down the *chicks*. The one at Clare's side of the tent fell immediately, having been tied up in a neat reef-knot. Mine, of course, had its string all mangled and twisted, and two figures in creaking silk night-gowns stood with cold, fumbling fingers before the *chick* slid heavily to the ground with a reassuring swish and thud.

We lay down again, resisting the temptation to keep the torches burning. Presently into our horrified ears came the unearthly cries of a pie dog. Its agonised screams died further and further away into the jungle. The panther was not going home empty-handed, as one might say, after all.

We had barely recovered from that when a "wind devil" got up, and began running round the tent, touching the sides with its horrible fingers. The narrow way between the tomb and the bungalow made a funnel of air, and the tent, standing as it did at the end of this lane, seemed to attract every breath that blew round the plateau. Altogether, sleeping-out in the tropics was an overrated experience.

In the morning there were pud-marks in the gravel outside the tent. The servants took the story as a personal insult. It implied that we had been afraid, and therefore the *banderbast* was a failure, and they were responsible. But, what was worse, and this I had not foreseen, it implied that the guards had slept at their posts, else, how could a panther unobserved have climbed the steps on to the terrace? The cries of the dog they dismissed, saying a dog had come, and they had thrown a stone at it. They brought the largest coolie in the camp, and tried to fit his bare feet into the animal's pud-marks. When this was a failure, they departed in a huff, leaving me with the guilty feeling that the panther was all my own fault, which, in one way, of course it was.

It was on the way back from the Jahaz Mahall that we asked permission of the Dewan to sleep in the tomb. We assured him that it would give no trouble to the palace servants. Our own bearers would carry in the three beds last thing after the dinner things had been cleared away and the table re-set for breakfast.

The Dewan was divided in his mind between anxiety and a desire to make his guests happy.

"And if the ghost should come, what would you do?"

"Scream and run for my life, as the subaltern did, I expect," I replied lightly.

"Well, I do not think a ghost would harm such charming people," he said, trying to reassure himself.

"I don't think charm will help us much, but I do think the blessing of that holy man will be protection between me and all evil."

In the end he was persuaded, and, on returning to camp, I informed Farman Shah of the arrangements for the night. He was darkly disapproving, with the sombre displeasure of a faithful old nurse.

"I don't want you to do it."

"But why?"

"You will be sick in the morning."

"Are you in such a hurry to leave here? Are you afraid, if I am ill, you will have to stay?"

He looked offended. "No, not that. But if you are sick, we are in the jungle, and I can get no doctor sahib."

"I am not in the least afraid. I was blessed by a holy man to-day. No ghost will dare to harm me to-night."

"Miss Sahib, the Dewan Sahib is a Hindu. He talk religion to you. It is not right of him. You must not listen to him. All Hindus burn for ever in hell."

"The Dewan Sahib will not burn in hell. He is a good, as well as a very charming, man."

"Well, every other Hindu, then, burn for ever. Miss Sahib is far from home; she must remember she is Christian."

I sat down on the edge of the bed. Farman Shah stood accusingly in front of me.

"Only Mohammedans and Christians go to heaven. They have Koran and Bible, Moses and Jesus, and they believe in true God."

"You are wrong. Hindus also believe in God."

"No, Miss Sahib, they believe in hand-making gods."

But, when Farman Shah began on hand-making, I lost patience, and, picking up my dressing-gown, I ended the discussion by going into the dressing-room.

In front of the terrace, in the open clearance, a huge fire had been built. After dinner, chairs were arranged, and we sat down to watch the crowds of Bhils assemble. These wild tribesmen from the jungle had heard a rumour of our presence, and had gathered to dance the fire-dance in our honour. Not even in the jungle is one safe from rumour in India ; that phrase, seldom off Farman Shah's lips, "They are saying," typified a land where a whisper heard in Madras spreads like a flame up the sub-continent, till it finally emerges into the crowded bazaars of Lahore. When my cousin's regiment returned to the North-West, after several years of absence, "they were saying" all over the Punjab and the Frontier that he was back in India. Indians came travelling, sometimes three days and three nights, to shake the hand of him who had once been their superior officer. They came in fine clothes, followed by servants bearing hampers of fruit or casks of honey for the Mamsahib and the baba. Rough hillsmen came, who had long ago served as sergeants or privates, journeying from some remote outlandish place, content to squat for hours in the compound till my cousin appeared. One day, an old, ragged man came, and hung about the verandah until nightfall, when he was rewarded for his patience. Years ago, when my cousin was fresh out from Sandhurst, the man had been his orderly in the regiment. He had travelled from the edge of civilisation, and, when my cousin asked how he knew of his return to the Frontier, the man replied : "My brother is in prison in

Peshawar, and they are saying in the jails that you are here, so I come."

The Bhils belong to that strange portion of the human race known as aborigines. They are, if we with our mongrel blood and modern civilisation would but admit it, true heirs of creation, since before we came they were. They were wanderers with their herds of goat and sheep, ranging about the hills from the Vindhya south into the Bombay Presidency. There was a time when they were a menace to the rest of India, but since the rule of Britain their wings have been clipped, and they have settled into peaceful ways, learning to be good soldiers and useful citizens. They have not entirely lost all their old picturesque customs, since they worship the seventh day of the moon, and still adhere to the fire-dance.

The success of the dance depends on the amount of highly intoxicating stuff that is poured down their throats before they begin, for they dance in a circle round the fire, with swords, until they are spent with frenzy. The leaping flames of the fire lit up their faces and illuminated the surrounding trees that stood watching in somewhat puritanical aspect the antics of the human race. The women danced together in a wide circle, hand in hand, at one side, surging and wailing, bending and rising. It was a strange, barbaric sight, but the rhythm of the dance was splendid in its utter unconscious abandonment to the elements of fire, night, and nature, by men stimulated to madness by excitement and strong drink. The dust rose in clouds from their stamping feet, mingling with the wood-smoke, and the air vibrated to their cries and the clashing of the swords. They would have danced on till they dropped to the ground from exhaustion, had not the Dewan, who knew that the secret of success is to stop before the audience is tired, brought the dance to an end, and, leaving the Bhils to gather their wits together before returning to their jungle homes, we went to the tomb to see whether our beds were ready.

The long dining-table had been pulled to one side. In

the dim light the white table-cloth and cups and saucers had a friendly air of morning that almost dispelled the strangeness of the shadowed corners and dim patterned dome. Three beds, with ghostly white mosquito-nets, stood side by side, with their heads in front of the wire door that covered the west entrance to the tomb.

"You are quite sure," the Dewan said, "that you will not change your minds? It would only take a minute to take the beds out again."

"Quite sure," we replied brutally. Looking back, I think it was selfish of us, because, whatever the chances there may have been of our sleeping well, it was quite certain that the anxious Prime Minister would never close an eye that night.

Miss James was one of those unhappy people who can count on one hand the number of nights in the year in which she had slept well. I, on the other hand, was one who took the thoughts and actions of the day with me through the night, and, when the day had been a particularly lively one, my bedclothes, in the morning, looked as if a pitched battle had been fought among the pillows.

"I hope I shan't disturb you," I said, as I was drawing the nets round my bed. "I'm afraid I'm a restless sleeper."

"I don't mind how much you toss, because I am certain not to sleep. One bad night with me brings another two or three after it. That's why I am here to-night. It's more unusual and interesting to lie awake in a tomb than in a bungalow."

We put out our torches, and I lay down on my left side, with my back towards Miss James's bed. Through the wire doorway across the south entrance, light from the terrace *buttis* fell across the stone floor. Through the mosquito-nets I looked up, hoping to see the gleam of blue tiles, but, above the bed, the darkness was impenetrable, and I had the uneasy feeling that we were isolated in the enormous, still sepulchre. I thought, listening to the silence, "If there is anything, and it does come, shall we mind very much, after

all ? ” I was conscious of the warmth and comfort of my bed, and of my position in the bed. There was no sound from the other two. I might have been lying between two corpses. If the grave were like that, it was something to be desired, not dreaded. If only sleep were like that—dreamless——

I opened my eyes. I was lying on my left side, lightly holding the handkerchief that I was going to push under my pillow before I slept. How long had I been asleep ? Twenty minutes, probably. I turned on my back. The light was no longer confined to the floor ; the walls of the tomb were visible, and, across the hall, beyond the table, was the wire doorway on the east side of the tomb. I looked, expecting to see a blank wall of darkness, but, instead, I saw a square of sky above tree-tops, and the sky was red with the dawn. I was so filled with a sense of peace and rest that I took the discovery without surprise. It was morning, and I had slept—been in a state of trance is a more accurate description—such as I had never known before. Not a sound came from either bed.

For a moment I thought, Had the ghost come, and were they both dead ? Then common sense returned, and I lay watching for the sun to rise, feeling like the Provençal of old : “ Ah, God, the dawn it comes so soon ! ”—for with the day came our departure. But, before the sun appeared above the tree-tops, I was asleep again.

The rattle of cups woke me ; it was seven o’clock, and Farman Shah was peering anxiously at me through the curtains. Swami was likewise bending tenderly over Miss James.

“ Well,” she said, and her voice was the voice of one who has been to the bottom of the sea, “ I can only think the Dewan must have put some dope in our food last night. I haven’t slept like that for ten years.”

“ You are not sick, Miss Sahib ? ” Farman Shah asked. “ No ghost came ? ”

“ On the contrary, we are better than we’ve been for ages, and, if any ghost came, we were none of us awake to hear it.”

“The Dewan Sahib no sleep last night. Dewan Sahib's bearer say Dewan Sahib is up many times in the night. But, every time he look, no sound, no light near the tomb, and he hope all is well.”

“Our compliments to the Dewan Sahib, and tell him that we slept the sleep of death, and we think that it was entirely thanks to the blessing of that holy man.”

CHAPTER VIII

FALLEN LUCIFER

THE BASKET CHAIRS by the side of the tennis-court were low and cushioned. A servant was carrying round glasses of iced orangeade. After the noise and heat of the city, it was pleasant to sit relaxed, half listening to the thud of the tennis-balls and to the mild chat that was going on in the club gardens. In my hands I held six bracelets that looked as if they had been made of scarlet sealing-wax picked out with gold and inset with tiny diamond-shaped pieces of mirror. I had bought them in a mud booth in the city, and I had paid four annas for the six. They were intended for coolie women who were too poor to buy either gold or silver ornaments ; but I had a vision of myself in white satin, with those scarlet bracelets on my right arm. If I had seen them in the rue de Rivoli I should have bought them, and paid a fancy price for their sheer bright colour. The fact that they cost four annas, and came from a booth in a filthy street in the city, in no way affected my opinion. From time to time I turned them, and my face was full of pleasure.

The Indian at my side looked down, and, in answer to my eager question, he replied in a voice of studied politeness : “ Yes, they are very pretty.” But he might as well have spoken his thought aloud, it was so obviously : “ Great heaven ! what taste the British have ! Those bracelets are fit only for a sweeper’s woman, and yet she thinks them attractive, and will actually wear them herself ! ”

The expression of polite disdain on that man’s face has been with me often since then, in those moments when the

impulse has come to wonder why Indians invariably copy the worst instead of the best European interior decoration.

I laughed and put the bracelets in my bag.

Behind the trees across the tennis-court rose the yellow stucco walls of the club-house. A gap in the hedge showed a patch of green lawn, and on it the Maharaja's son and daughter at play. The children were dressed alike, in shirts and trousers of washing-silk, and their heads were bare. They played at ball with two little English girls with curly yellow hair. When the Maharaja's daughter was displeased, she turned and gave her brother a sound slap.

The Englishwoman who was sitting on my left saw me smile at the children.

"What did you know of India before you came out?" she asked.

"I thought that Indians neglected and maltreated their daughters, and that they all loathed animals." As I spoke, my eyes went from the Maharaja's small daughter, who had just snatched the ball imperiously from her brother, to the expression on the face of an A.D.C.'s Alsatian, who lay watching his master's play with a look of impassioned love.

"I don't at this moment want to speak about cruelty to animals, whether from ignorance or design, but I will say that I know a Muslim bearer on the Frontier who will give up his dinner-hour to guarding or walking his master's dog, and the two play together in the compound like children. And the only other educated Hindu I have met who always had a dog at his heels had managed to inspire the animal with a remarkable devotion. As to daughters, I know too many nurseries in England where the boy is treated like a little god, and given in to in everything, to wish to criticise the customs of any other country. But one thing I have noticed, and that is the amazing way in which little boys look after their sisters in the streets. I noticed it in Peshawar and I noticed it in Delhi, and it's the same in the States. It is remarkable how carefully and gently the little boys

guard their smaller sisters. I'm speaking, of course, of the class of children who are sent out to play without an ayah.

"Family life and loyalty exist in India in a way that we can't understand in the West."

The Maharaja was sitting perched up on a scoring-chair. He and his A.D.C. had taken off their coats, and wore muslin shirts and white duck jodhpurs. The A.D.C. was playing with three Englishmen. Presently the set ended, and one of the Englishmen excused himself and walked away. The Maharaja took his place. On the other court they were playing a mixed doubles.

The air was beginning to grow cool, and a servant came with a white velvet coat and put it on the Maharaja's daughter. Out of the club-room strolled an Englishman ; he walked slowly across the lawn and in at the wire gate towards the courts. The Maharaja looked from him to the four on the second court. "Two-three," a voice called. "You will forgive me if I play no more," the Maharaja said. "My hand is troubling me to-night, and here is someone who will take my place."

A murmur went round the group on the basket chairs, and one of the women said :

"His Highness's hand always bothers him if there is a chance of anyone having to stand out. He is too unselfish, and all the members take advantage of his good nature."

The Maharaja touched the new-comer on the shoulder, then he went to pick up his coat. He had the lean, athletic figure of the polo-player, and the expression of his eyes was sad and patient.

Sitting relaxed in my chair, watching the sun set behind the club-house, it was hard to believe that I had seen the sky red with dawn from the east door of the nobleman's tomb. Only twelve hours separated me from that dawn and this sunset. Yet already Mandū had receded into the past, and those waking hours had been packed with a bewildering variety of impression. I saw as in a dream the last breakfast in the tomb, the farewells to the Dewan, the start of the

loaded cars, and the long drive across country. Then came the brief halt at the small, bare dark bungalow where grapes were eaten while we waited for one of the men who had gone driving away from us between the poinsettia-beds of the palace garden three days before. His road from the south-east converged with ours from the City of Joy, where the empty garden of the bungalow stood in an angle made by three roads. I tried to remember our conversation as the car sped along the straight, flat road. But I could only see through the open car windows the strange, pale plateau land on either side, where the silk cotton-trees, with swollen blossoms and bare stems, stood up proud and lonely by the edge of the road. After the peace of the jungle and the silence of the country round the palace where we had stayed before Mandū, it was strange to hear again the hoot of a train and to drive past a road that led into the crowded thoroughfare of a large city. How long was it since we had left our friend's house? How many days since I had received the tilka at the Temple of Kāli?

I turned to the woman on my left.

"Please, what day of the week is this?"

"What did you say?"

"It doesn't matter. I don't really want to know."

"You've just come from Mandū, haven't you?" Her voice was sympathetic. Perhaps she had been there herself, and felt that it justified the absurdity of my remark.

"Yes," I said, and added quickly: "How well the A.D.C. serves." I was afraid that she was going to intrude upon my thoughts, to question me about our experiences. Selfishly, at that moment, I wanted to keep it all to myself. It was too soon to communicate even the surface events to others.

From one of the chairs behind us came the sound of my friend's voice. She spoke in her habitual sweet unselfishness, that was a constant rebuke to me. "If you have been there, you will know that it is well named the City of Joy. It is impossible to be there and not to fall under the spell of its

happy atmosphere, just as it is impossible to be there and not to be good as well as happy."

I looked over my shoulder. "Do you think it has worn off already?"

"My dear, you shouldn't allow yourself to be so susceptible to atmosphere."

I sighed. She had no dark horse to contend with, either within or without. It was after such hours of exaltation as I had known in Mandū that Lucifer, son of the morning, fell. Intoxication of the spirit may have as dangerous an after-effect as its physical counterpart, and we had dropped that day not only from an altitude that could be measured in feet and inches. For, as we stepped out of the cars on to the verandah of the Maharaja's guest-house, we entered into another world: a world of walls hung with floral paper, deep arm-chairs, polished mahogany furniture, and soft box-spring mattresses. It was a world of luxury that had nothing to say to holy man or ruined palaces or the silence that broods over the jungle. Nor had it anything to say to joy, for below the padded surface there lurked a sense of tragedy. I sensed it in the vast, heavily furnished bedroom that was the antithesis of all the rooms I had occupied since reaching India. Yet there was everything in that room the heart of woman could desire: great cupboards, and long mirrors with triple glasses that showed your profile, electric lights hanging at the proper angle, an immense soft bed with polished posters, and a bathroom opening out, with a European bath and taps and all the mechanical contrivances that are not usually found in India.

At luncheon in the grey-and-mauve dining-room with the Maharaja the talk was of polo and tennis and soldiering—healthy outdoor talk—and the undercurrents were still; and I thought: What a fool you are not to accept the world at its surface value.

Then the soft arms of that bed received me, and I slept for half an hour, till Farman Shah came and said: "You should get up, Miss Sahib; it's nearly tea-time."

There were scones and cakes in the drawing-room, and I tried to think of England, but it was beyond my reach, and all that my mind gave back was a dim sense that that way lay responsibility and care, and quickly I dismissed the thought. The Dewan was waiting to take us sight-seeing. He was in every way a contrast to the Dewan we had left behind in the City of Joy, and we preferred not to think of him as a Dewan at all, because at that moment Dewan meant to us all that was good and charming.

The cars stopped outside the huge, staring, white palace, that was like a nightmare of a wedding-cake, with peaks and turrets and screens behind which the Maharaja's wives watched the outside life of the courts within the palace gates. Beyond the blazing flower-beds were the stables, where the polo-ponies lived in luxurious loose-boxes, and each horse had his own particular *syce*. The names on the loose-boxes were Gadfly, Puck, My Own—names that suggested the tranquil pastures of England. But in the rolling eyes of the polo-ponies I caught a look of uneasy sorrow that reminded me of their master.

Beyond the palace, out in the country, there was an old tree among whose branches and roots there stood a Hindu shrine. The tree held the shrine fast in its embraces, and it was hard to tell whether they were separate entities or whether the age-long mingling had not given life to the shrine or death to the dried branches of the tree.

"No one knows," the Dewan said, "whether the tree was planted before the shrine was built, or whether the shrine came first and the tree grew round it. They are so old that no one knows anything about them, except that ever since the State was here they have stood like that, together."

I looked from the tree-embracing shrine to the tall, ungainly figure of the Dewan, and I remembered that it was in small proportions that just beauties are seen.

Yet in the crowded streets of the city, where there was poverty and dirt and smell if I had paused to think about it, I forgot the unhappy light in the ponies' eyes and the dry,

bald arms of the tree, for here was life and humanity. When the cars stopped before the open mud huts where the bracelet makers were at work, and I climbed up beside the woman who turned and twisted the soft clay in the small flickering flame of the fire, the eager crowds pressed closely round me, and I thought, "This is India," and I was happy.

Someone touched my arm. The light was fading and the tennis was over. The men were putting on their coats and scarves, talking and laughing.

"The Maharaja wants us to speak to the children."

The Maharaja and his tall A.D.C. went with us across the lawn. The little boy shook hands, and the Maharaja lifted up the little girl to be kissed. The children had small, pointed, ivory faces, exquisite features, and enormous black eyes. They were the loveliest children I had ever seen. They came with us over to the cars, and stood, a group of five—the Maharaja, the A.D.C., the two children, and the Alsatian. Behind their heads the lights from the open clubhouse door shone upon them. They made a charming picture, and as the cars started the children waved their hands and shouted an English good-bye.

"What are you thinking?"

"I am thinking which dress I shall wear for the Maharaja's dinner-party."

"Is that all?"

"Not entirely. Because I am also thinking that if I were rich and powerful, and if my heir apparent had eyes like that, I should contrive to be happy as well as good-natured."

There was silence in the car, for everyone was tired, and my idle words went unheeded.

Presently I added: "It has always seemed to me unjust that, of all the sinners in the world, Lucifer the Fallen has had the most blame and the least pity. No one ever really tried to put him on his feet again."

"I don't know what you're talking about," Clare said.

"Remember, Cicely, the height from which he fell."

"But he fell voluntarily. There is something grand and

glorious about a deliberate sinner. To me the saddest words ever uttered by Christ are the ' Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.' There is something so much worse about an ignorant sinner, who makes you suffer and doesn't even know that he has done it. But the golden Lucifers who sin in the light——"

" But what a light it is ! "

" You mean the white searchlight that beats about a throne ? "

" Surely," she said, " you believe that the consequences of all action are eternal ? "

" That has a cold, Presbyterian flavour that hardly goes with the evening air of India."

" Yet your friends the Hindus would teach you that in their inescapable doctrine of reincarnation. In that you find the seed-time and harvest most logically proclaimed."

The car stopped outside the guest-house.

The hovering servants were ready with their offers of a *nimbu pane*.

" On such a night as this it profits one better to think of lace and satin, which it shall be."

" And, best of all, it profits you not to think at all of Lucifer and his accomplices." For a second her hand was on my shoulder. Then she added : " Please don't be late. The Maharaja is very punctual."

CHAPTER IX

THE BIRTHDAY PARTY

THE ROAD for several miles outside the capital was lined with flags and paper streamers. The school-house was hung with bunting and banners of welcome. In the middle of the dusty road stood the Raja's car, waiting to greet and escort his guests to the camp. The cars advanced in procession at a foot-pace. A notice said : " To the Camp," and a pointing arrow directed the attention to an archway of flowers. To the strains of the Raja's State anthem and to the earth-shaking noise of a salute of eleven guns we entered the birthday camp.

Servants with a carrying-chair waited to lift the Raja out of his car and to carry him into the drawing-room tent. It was sixteen years since the Raja had walked more than a few paces, leaning on a servant's arm. The uncharitable maintained that he was too proud to touch the common earth. He had beautiful large eyes, with a melancholy light in them that is more often seen in an animal's than a man's, and fine features and a long, well-cared-for moustache. The expression of his face was sweet, and his voice was soft and rather feminine. But the most noticeable thing was his hands. They were the loveliest hands I have ever seen on any human being, long and pale and exquisitely shaped: hands that had never done an hour's work in their lives, but of a beauty that was remarkable. The nails were polished with a deep crimson varnish, and on one hand he wore a square emerald ring and on the other a square ruby surrounded by small pearls. While he talked, the Raja kept his hands lightly folded on the beige rug that lay across his knees.

The Dewan was in contrast to his master, a sturdy, square man who told us that he was a Kashmiri. "But," he added, "my family has been settled these two hundred years in the centre of India." By which reasoning I am justified in calling myself both Irish and Austrian. But the East can boast of longer pedigrees even than the Italians, and no doubt two hundred years' exile is not considered much in a land where one at least of its reigning princes claims descent from the Sun.

The drawing-room tent was large and cool, and the upholstered chairs and sofas were deep and comfortable. After the dusty drive across country the dim light was soothing. A revolving fan, invented by the Raja, contained in a box that suggested a wireless receiver, sent out shafts of cold air, and hummed and buzzed like a large mosquito with a droning sound that made one sleepy. Conversation was vanquished, and in another moment I should have slept, if a voice had not said : "With your permission, Your Highness, I will ask the Dewan Sahib to show us to our tents."

At the far end of the camp the Raja's guest-house had been converted into a dining-room and kitchens for the guests. Around the central drawing-room tent the other tents were arranged, forming three sides of a square. Behind the tents, each bearer had a small tent within calling distance from his master. Clare and I found ourselves in a suite containing five rooms, and in the large central one, hung with red and yellow, Farman Shah was examining the beds.

"Does Miss Sahib want her own bedding?" he asked. "This bedding all new : mattress, blankets, sheets. No one ever slept in it. So new not even had to be washed."

There are certain things that are unteachable, and one is the moment when to speak and when to be silent.

I said hastily, lest the Dewan be offended : "It was quite unnecessary of you to bring the bedding-rolls at all." Then I went on to praise the tent. I spoke with such rapture that when he went away the Dewan was smiling. Perhaps he hadn't heard Farman Shah's tactlessness.

Or

The rest of the party, including the chief guest and his wife, arrived in the afternoon. From the tops of our beds, as we lay resting in the hot hour that followed lunch, we heard the salute of twenty-one guns that announced their arrival.

At half past four there was a solemn reception of all the guests in the drawing-room, followed by a procession, according to official rank, to the dining-room for tea. Perhaps there is something in the air of India that breeds a love of ceremony, or is it the brief exalted reign of authority thrust upon people whose antecedents are rather commonplace, that makes the British in India as touchy as the Indians themselves on the matters of precedence? Certainly, if an outsider were to be foolish enough to thrust himself forward, it would be the British whose systems would receive the greatest shock, and the man who nightly takes the lowest seat does so knowing that he is quite certain to remain there for the evening, if there are any British officials about, for no friendly voice will bid him move up higher.

Outside the dining-room, all the cars of the State and several from neighbouring States, borrowed for the occasion, were lined up. The Raja and the chief guest's wife headed the procession, followed carefully, according to India Office lists, by the rest of the party. It seemed an odd angle from which to approach the *chikkar*, but perhaps it was no stranger than the practice of blessing the hounds before a meet, which still pertains to this day in certain parts of the Continent.

About three miles from the camp the beaters were gathered. All the men, except the Raja and a young Englishman who was too modest to try his skill with the others, left the cars. The Raja then proceeded with the chief guest's wife, in his car, having first invited Miss James to sit in front with the driver. Clare and I and the modest man followed in a second car.

About a mile across the scrub country there was some rising ground. Against the clear skyline a group of horsemen, with lances and some hounds, stood motionless. A third car,

with the Raja's children and their tutor, was near the horsemen.

The Raja's car came to a standstill in front of the children's, while ours stopped modestly in the rear.

The heat had gone from the sun, and the air was still and fragrant. The intense silence of the scrub country was round us, a world without bird or insect ; nothing but a bare stretch of coarse grass on all sides.

We left the cars and went to speak to the children. The Raja's two sons, aged fourteen and eleven, were seated at the back of the car. A boy of about twelve or thirteen sat between them, dressed, like the others, in a puggari, long cloth coat, and grey jodhpurs. He had a fair skin, long features, and laughing black eyes.

" Who is the other child ? " I asked.

The tutor in front heard me, and replied : " It is His Highness's eldest daughter. Like her brothers, she is a fearless rider, and is keen on all sports."

" May I ask how old she is ? "

" She is twelve years old."

As we walked towards the Raja's car, I wondered what the future of that child would be. In the West it is only a matter of taste if you dress your girl as you do your son ; but, unless they found for her an unusually enlightened husband, bare-back riding and pigsticking were hardly a good preparation for the zenana.

The Raja, with his beige rug over his knees, his jewelled hands lightly clasped, sat in the back seat of the touring-car, looking more than ever like a mediæval potentate. In the midst of complimenting him on the charm of his children, a cry went up :

" *Suar ! Suar !* " (A pig, a pig !)

Everyone shouted, and there was a moment's pandemonium. Then we saw him—a squat, dark figure coming at full tilt across our path.

The chief guest's wife wrenched the door open and screamed : " Get in ! Get in ! " A figure in an orange-coloured puggari,

lance in hand, leapt on to the running-board of the car. Clare was behind me ; I turned to push her in.

They were still calling : " For goodness' sake, get in ! " The car was going at twenty miles an hour as I took the leap and landed sprawling across the proud legs of the Raja—those legs that for many years had refused to bear their owner more than a few steps over the common earth of this world.

The door wouldn't shut. Somehow we hung on, going a good thirty-five miles an hour over the uneven ground, up hill and down dale. The pig was in front. The man with the lance crouched ready. The pig doubled suddenly ; with a lurch that nearly sent me over the Raja's legs out through the open door, the car turned. The driver fumbled his gear with excitement. The pig had the start, and in a moment it was gone. We had come full circle and were back almost where we had started.

With many apologies for the want of ceremony, I got off the Raja's legs and out of the car. He made a graceful gesture with his hands. " It was of no consequence," he said.

We returned with the modest young man to our own car, and waited for fifteen minutes, looking out at the clear pale sky that was beginning to turn red as the sun sank.

" If another pig doesn't come soon, the light will be gone."

Another did come. The cry went up and the chase began, wilder and faster this time. We caught up with the pig ; he was just in front of us. The driver, pallid with excitement, was cutting off his retreat. He was parallel with the car.

" Shoot, shoot, can't you ? " we shouted to the modest man.

" I'll kill the dog."

" Never mind the dog—shoot ! "

He missed. We were in front of the pig. He swerved violently. A dog bit his hind leg, a second dog caught up with the first and rolled over, a third was panting at his heels. The pig was making desperate efforts. Again we were parallel with him ; the dogs were a pace behind.

"For goodness' sake, shoot, man!"

Our eyes were savage with excitement. I held Clare's belt in case the door burst open.

He fired again, and missed. There was a river-bed, dried up, in front of us, and a high bank beyond. Could we get in front of the pig before it reached the river, and so give the dogs a chance? The pig was in front. The driver accelerated, gained on the pig, passed him, swerved with all his force. Just as we turned there was a sickening crash and lurch. In my excitement I hardly noticed.

"Stop! The mudguard has gone."

The car stopped violently of its own accord, pitching us on to the floor.

The pig crashed across the stony bed of the river, and disappeared over the bank, with the dogs at its heels. I was filled with a sense of cruel disappointment.

"Be thankful you are alive, instead of moaning over the pig."

Slowly we got out of the car. One of the back wheels was off, and had gone rolling down the hill into the river-bed. Looking back over the perilous tracks left by the car in the rough grass of the hillside, I realised that I had reason to be thankful.

The other two cars came up with us, to examine the damage and to congratulate us on our run. We watched them as they turned and drove slowly away up over the uneven ground. There was no room for us in either car, unless I again sat on the Raja's legs. A car was to be sent out to rescue us as soon as possible.

The light faded suddenly from the sky and the air was cool with evening. The dogs returned, panting with exhaustion, from their fruitless run. The pig had got safely away. As I sat on the rough grass and my blood began to cool in the night air, I realised what had hitherto puzzled me: how it was possible for the British, who as a nation are the most humane and devoted in their relations with all animals, to be the keenest sportsmen. Sitting quietly while the modest

man and the driver tried to put the wheel back on to the car, I was glad that the pig had escaped. Yet in that mad drive, with blood boiling with excitement, I had been ready to risk my life, and the lives of the four other people in the car, to see a dog shot in error, and the pig finally killed either by the dogs or the modest man, if only that moment of intoxication could be prolonged. Once I had criticised a girl who admitted that she was willing to sacrifice everything else for her hunting. She was standing with one arm round her hunter's neck. Her dog was sitting on her feet, pressed tight against her legs, and her cat was perched on her shoulder.

"I must say I don't understand you."

"It's not the kill. That's beastly, of course, if you analyse it. It's the excitement of the run. Once you've experienced that particular thrill, nothing else in the world will satisfy you. You have to go on. But I can't make you understand, unless you've been through it yourself."

Now, as the darkness deepened round me, I felt that I did understand. It was the excitement and the danger that sport meant, an excitement more potent and perhaps as deadly as drink.

It was a quarter to eight as we turned under the floral archway into camp.

"We'll have to be quick if we have to be bathed and dressed and ready in the drawing-room to start for the palace at eight-twenty," I said.

"I shouldn't worry. I am quite sure it won't matter if you are ten minutes late. No one will dream of starting before eight-thirty at the earliest."

"Why?"

"Why what?"

"Why start at eight-thirty if the Raja has asked us to start at twenty past?"

"Oh, well, this is India. Punctuality doesn't matter here."

"I thought one of the things Gandhi was grateful to the British for teaching him was punctuality. How did he contrive to learn that if we don't practise it in his country?"

As he held open the door for us to get out, he looked quickly to see whether I were serious. "What funny things you do say," he said doubtfully. As I hurried to my bath, I wondered whether his "funny" meant the same as the Khan's hand that day in the Malakand.

The Raja stood leaning on an ebony stick at the top of the palace steps. He wore a gold brocaded coat, a pale-green puggari with an aigrette in front, held in place by a cluster of diamonds, and round his neck row upon row of pearls the size of peas. Open doors led into an ante-room, and the guests, having received the Raja's welcome, went and sat down on the plush sofas that had been arranged with a careful air of symmetry. A group of young Thakors in pale brocaded coats and flowing puggaris stood in one corner and conversed together, with the selfconscious backs of those who are thinking: "I know I ought to go and help entertain His Highness's guests, but I can't face it yet. I'll wait one minute, and then I'll go." Which is the way of young men all over the world.

The banquetting-hall opened out of the ante-room. It was a vast apartment with windows opening on to the compound behind the palace, and had the chilly aspect of an apartment that is only used on State occasions. The table was decorated with red and yellow flowers and banks and chains of crackers. It was a pity that the Raja's children did not belong to the order and generation that came in to dessert. But perhaps they and the Rani were peering in at the party through some chink in a doorway. The Raja collected all the trinkets and toys that fell to his share from the crackers, and arranged them neatly in front of him.

"Those are for your Highness's children, I expect?" And I added a heap of the tiny tin motors, bead rings, and paper caps to his pile.

"But you are keeping none for yourself, Miss Sahib."

"Indeed I am, and I should like your children to have these."

The Raja looked pleased, and he swept the pile into his

pocket. The attitude of fathers seems to be much the same, whether they live in Farnborough or in Central India.

The courtyard of the palace was thronged with squatting figures. The whole male population of the Raja's miniature kingdom had come into the capital to take part in the birth-day celebrations. "It is the way to keep them contented," the Raja said during dinner. "They have not much in their lives ; a little pleasure goes a long way with them. Don't be afraid to leave everything open in the camp. Go where you like and do what you like. You are safe here. My people are content, and have no wish to harm others. You are not in British India ; it is different in the States."

I was for ever hearing that these days. All the princes said the same thing. It was always : "You are not in British India, and therefore you are safe from harm."

In the courtyard, the men in their white clothes and brilliantly coloured puggaris sat closely packed like flowers in a window-box. In the centre a trellised stand had been erected, hung with coloured electric lights. At one side a large white screen had been put up, and, as the guests came out of the palace, their astonished eyes met the sight of Charlie Chaplin twirling his stick beside a lake in the park. It was a very young Charlie Chaplin, and the film quivered as if a hurricane was about to sweep it away altogether. Its surface was covered with strange scars, like a skin-eruption, and when Charlie walked across the screen he went faster than an express train, giving the impression of an electron, which I believe is both here and there simultaneously. Then the leading lady appeared, with a bang of hair like a *sadhu* and a good deal of frilly petticoat showing as she whisked her skirts. It must have been one of Charlie Chaplin's first films, "shot" before the war, and it is a mystery how it ever reached Central India. It was received in dead silence by the audience, who were evidently too overcome to show any animation.

Chairs had been arranged along the verandah above the palace steps, and the Raja and his guests sat down, leaving

a space in the centre for servants to pass out and in of the palace with trays of drink. When the film ended, the courtyard was cleared, the men rising to their feet and slowly pushing back until they were beyond the range of the lights, and the courtyard was empty and ready for the Bana dance.

The orchestra, which had been playing ceaselessly since our arrival at the palace, paused, then began to tune up again. Servants hurried out of the palace with armfuls of long, thin, velvet-covered sticks hung with bells. Each guest was given two sticks. The Bana dance is peculiar to that region, and its origin is lost in the mists before the beginning of history. The men form a large circle about the stand, for a select few ride through the dance on horseback, and to that end the stand had been erected. The rest dance in the circle, each man with his sticks, which he beats in time to the music : beat together, one ; beat to the right, two ; beat together, three ; beat to the left, four. The men stood alternately facing or backing to the centre, their feet keeping pace with their hands, their bodies making the alternate turn with each beat together.

The horsemen rode into the courtyard and solemnly clattered on to the stand. They rode white horses hung with red trappings, like horses in a mediæval tapestry. The dancers took their places. The Indian guests ran down the palace steps. Two of the Englishmen went with them and took their stand in the circle.

The Dewan was sitting beside me. I asked him if he did not dance. " Not to-night," he replied.

The music began. Slowly the horsemen and the dancers revolved in circle, beating time, with clashing bells. The rhythm was intoxicating, and the scene, exotic and brilliant, like a pageant in a pre-Renaissance painting. The hot, still air smelt of musk and dust ; overhead the sky sparkled with stars, and the courtyard, with its coloured lights, illuminated the trellised stand, the white horses with their crimson hangings stepping slowly in time to the music, the graceful riders,

and the wide circle of men like toy figures in flowing pug-garis and delicate brocaded coats.

Apart from the electric lighting, the courtyard presented a picture that had remained unchanged with the succeeding centuries, and what I saw that night might have taken place while the three young kings of Europe were preparing to spread the Field with the Cloth of Gold.

The Raja beckoned a servant. The man came, bent double with reverence, and as he approached his master he put his hands together in an exquisite humility and laid his forehead over them. The Raja gave his order, and the man retreated backwards, bending till he almost fell over. Not since the Middle Ages has Europe known such absolute power among its princes as exists to-day in the States.

It was difficult to believe that this was not illusion or a dream, but reality. One of the Englishmen came up the steps out of the circle and sank panting in the aisle at my side. The music went on and on without pause. The rhythm was beating in my brain. The women guests sat banging their sticks together in time.

"I wish I could dance," I said, almost without realising that I had spoken.

The Englishman and the Dewan looked at each other.

"She could dance between us, Sahib," the Dewan pleaded.

"Of course she could. Come on."

But, as I rose, I remembered. I was not in Europe. I turned to the chief guest, bending across my neighbour on the left. "Would it be all right?"

"No, it would not." That was all.

As I sat down again I caught the Raja's eye across the aisle in which the Englishman and the Dewan were sitting. The Raja made a charming gesture towards the courtyard.

"His Highness is inviting you to dance," the Dewan said softly.

"It is too late," I replied. I remembered that my cousin had said that tempers were short in the East. But I was determined not to spoil the evening with anger.

The Raja and the Dewan looked at each other and smiled. They understood only too well.

When the dance was over, trays were brought out by the servants, and the Raja stood leaning on his stick. To each guest he gave a square scarlet paper box of *til sankant*, the small, hard sweets which are prepared by ladies of the household for the Hindu religious festival in January, and which are considered a great favour when given by one Hindu to another. The cars were coming in procession through the palace gates towards the steps. It was almost midnight, but, nothing daunted, we were off to the theatre.

On the outskirts of the town they had erected a stage, and walled in an enormous auditorium which was half open to the sky. The two front rows were filled with arm-chairs and sofas for the Raja and his guests. On our arrival the action of the play was suspended. It took some time for us all to be seated, and meanwhile the actors remained like painted wooden images against the drop-curtain. The auditorium was packed with men. Evidently after the cinema show the population had moved on to the theatre. The bearers and servants from the camp had been invited. Farman Shah had told me, in great excitement, while I was putting on my evening coat, that he was going.

The play was about the life of King Sivaji II. The players were young men in their late teens and little boys with piping voices and round fat cheeks. There was a great deal of noise and much singing in high nasal voices, and occasionally a ballet of small boys who bounded across the stage with grave faces and stiff, unnatural attitudes. The heroine of the piece was played by a tall, lanky youth with an ugly face and a remarkable natural gift for acting. I never discovered for certain which was King Sivaji, but I think he was a sturdy young man in a crimson robe whose youthful countenance was disguised by a large black beard.

The Dewan, who sat near, tried to explain the play to us. The boys belonged to a famous Bombay theatrical company, and were in the habit of touring the States

for special occasions, as well as performing in Bombay.

“A child of any age may appear publicly, at any hour of the night?”

“Yes, Miss Sahib.”

I wondered what were the conditions of life for these boys behind the scenes, some of them young children. Probably they were much the same as they had been in Europe a hundred years ago, and I could understand if an Indian father said to his son: “I’d rather see you dead and buried than on the stage.” It was not long ago that such sentiments prevailed in English homes. Still, I did not say so to the Dewan. I sat and watched the little boys, who appeared quite happy and healthy, and meditatively I ate *til sankant* sweets out of my crimson box. Some of them tasted of cloves, and were delicious. Hitherto my only acquaintance with cloves had been limited to a shuddering sight of them leering from the sodden depths of apple-tart.

When at length we rose to leave, the play was only half finished. It was two o’clock as we drove through the dark roads back to the camp. The tent seemed enormous and full of shadows, in spite of the electric lights that dangled from the central poles in the top canvas. It was strangely cold after the heat of the day. The night air crept chilly through the dhurries from the scrub grass underneath.

The rhythm of the Bana dance was still in my head. But as I shudderingly brushed my teeth with Evian water at three rupees a bottle—Farman Shah had forgotten, in his excitement, to give us boiled water—it was of those tired little boys I thought, still thumping their way through their ballet.

CHAPTER X

PĀN

“ **H**AVE YOU EVER READ *Tom Sawyer* ? ”

“ Of course I have.”

“ Then what does this remind you of ? ”

“ Examination Day at Tom Sawyer’s school.”

We were sitting on the platform, with our backs to the wall, facing the school. The platform provided inadequate accommodation for the Raja and his guests, and some of the guests were sitting half out of the windows. The walls of the school were festooned with wreaths of paper flowers, and hung with exhortations to patriotism, morality, and hygiene, written in two languages.

An aisle in the centre divided the sheep from the goats. The master frisked distractedly up and down his side. The schoolmistress, who evidently had an old-fashioned belief that virtue and dowdiness went hand in hand, twittered among the girls, trying to show, by the agitated composure of her manner, that she had burst the bonds of purdah and feared the presence of no man.

The proceedings opened with all the little girls rising and singing, with much undue emphasis, a patriotic song. It was impossible to discover whether it was in English or Hindi.

The male scholars ranged in age from chubby five-year-olds to fully matured men, whose passion for learning, I conclude, drove them to take advantage of the free education offered by the State.

The Raja’s two sons were among the pupils, which piece of democratic levelling seemed out of keeping with my memory of last night’s dinner at the palace.

After the girls had ended their shrill song, the youngest prince rose and stepped into the aisle. Until a moment before, he had been a merry looking boy, but, as he left his seat, it was as if all expression had been wiped off his face. He stood with his eyes fixed on the air, and, in a voice entirely without life, he began :

“ *Stern Daughter of the Voice of God . . .* ”

“ It’s a disgrace to the world that such an exhibition is possible in the twentieth century. It’s worse than *Tom Sawyer*. ”

“ Remember, it’s not his own language. ”

“ That boy speaks and understands English perfectly when he’s out of school. ”

He recited the seven verses of the poem without pause for punctuation, his voice never varying from the expressionless whine.

“ *And in the light of Truth thy bondman let me live,* ”

he finished. He bowed as if his body was worked by wires from behind, jerked himself back to his bench, and immediately ceased to be an automaton and became again a flesh-and-blood boy.

The Raja rose, and, leaning on the table in front, made a short, graceful speech, in English, upon the value of education as a means of character-building and mind-training. A pile of books was placed before His Highness ; the master read out the names, and the pupils ambled up to the platform to receive their prizes. The Heir Apparent was given *The Moonstone*, bound in red cloth, and his brother a dark-green copy of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, which highly moral tale seemed a strange prize for an Indian boy.

“ I don’t think even the Stern Daughter deserved such a reward. Who on earth has the choosing of the books ? ”

“ Hush ! ”

The master leapt to his feet, and, his papers flapping nervously, made a rambling speech, to which no one listened.

The moment he had finished, the assistant master jumped up, and began to speak. His Highness coughed, and someone plucked him in the rear. There was a quick sibilant whisper, which, being translated, probably meant : " Sit down, you fool." The man sat down, looking rather sheepish, and, a moment later, the Raja and his guests were out in the hot sunshine of a dusty field, to watch the Boy-Scouts' parade.

" What now ? " I asked, half an hour later.

" You are all to visit the Rani, while we men inspect the prison and hospital."

" Are there many criminals in this small State, do you suppose ? "

" None at all, I should think."

" Surely it's rather a waste of time to inspect an empty jail ? "

" Oh, it won't be empty to-day. One or two extremely respectable citizens will have been hired to play the parts of thief and assassin for our benefit. It will all be entirely business-like, and as it should be."

At the left side of the verandah outside the palace, a flight of steps led to the Rani's apartments. The two young princes were waiting to escort us to their mother, who received us in a vast apartment furnished in Victorian style. She was dressed in stiff gold brocaded robes, and her eyes were rimmed with black paint, and her arms and neck were circled with pearls and gold ornaments. She received us very graciously. Unfortunately, she spoke Hindi, and there was only one among us who could talk Hindi. We sat in an embarrassing semicircle, six Englishwomen, in plain washing frocks and plain felt or straw hats, without ornament except for a single row of beads—coral, jade, or imitation pearls—round each throat. The Rani looked graciously from one to another, and, if she smiled in secret wonder, it was perhaps because she pitied Englishmen for having such unattractive womenkind. But, since they did not know what they were missing, no doubt it did not matter.

A few weeks before, I had met a Greek, who told me that he had been in almost every country in the world, and that, as beauty interested him, he had made a study of comparative feminine charms.

"What conclusion have you come to?" I asked.

"There is no question; the most beautiful women in the world are the Indian. I don't mean the women you see in the hotels and driving about. I mean the women you do not see—the women who are kept in purdah. They are the loveliest creatures in the world—beautiful beyond compare."

I refrained from asking him how, if they were kept in purdah, he had managed to see them.

If the Rani and her guests found conversation difficult, the rest of the room buzzed with talk from the crowd of ayahs and Court ladies, who kept up a stream of comment upon our appearance.

The two youngest children, aged three years and nine months respectively, were brought in, and the three-year-old placed on the sofa between its mother and the chief guest's wife, where she sat with perfect composure, gazing at the world through grave, black, painted eyes. Her sister was thrust into my arms by one of the ayahs, with a suddenness that alarmed us both. She was dressed in blue velvet and white braid blouse and knickers, and a white bonnet. It was, as Farman Shah would have said, English fashion, and not a fashion I admired. She gave me one searching look, and burst into a protesting scream. Instantly an aged ayah rescued her, and she was borne, yelling, from the room.

"She is usually so good," the Dewan's wife said mildly.

"I don't wonder she cried. She was appalled by my appearance."

The Dewan's wife laughed. She had a charming, good-humoured face, and her wrists were covered by fine gold bracelets. Her sari was a lovely pale tawny colour, and her softly waving hair was not many shades darker than my own. She moved her chair closer to mine.

"You write books?" she said confidentially.

I looked down at the second finger of my right hand. But, no, it was free from any stain of ink. For a moment I had forgotten that this was India and an Indian palace. I had only been twenty-four hours among them, but, already, they probably knew all the major facts about my life and habits.

"Do you also play the violin, Miss Sahib?"

"No, I am afraid I don't."

"Her Highness plays. She also embroiders. As you go out, I will show you some of her work. She is very intelligent."

The youngest prince rose and left the room. Presently he returned, with a violin. "My mother will play to you," he said. We sat and listened.

"She is playing an English tune," he said.

"Is she?" we said politely.

It must have been difficult to play, sitting on the sofa, with the child and the chief guest's wife beside her. But the child sat very still, and so did the chief guest's wife.

Before we left, the Rani garlanded us with long thick chains of gold tinsel trimmed with fringe and coloured-paper hearts. Scent was put on our handkerchiefs. I felt resentful that I had not been warned, as then I should not have dived indiscriminately into my handkerchief-box that morning. The austerity of my plain linen handkerchief was in keeping with my frock, and to trail about the morning dust of camp in fleecy shirts of lace or chiffon would have been in the grossest taste. But, on the other hand, both the Rani and the Dewan's wife had obviously put their best clothes on for our benefit, and to this day I can't help regretting that the compliment was not returned. There is too much still of the attitude: "There won't be any other Britons there, so it doesn't matter"—a survival of the days when Englishwomen wore old waterproofs on the Boulevards of Paris, and earned us the reputation for hideosity.

Later in the day, the Dewan asked me if I did not think that of all the styles of dress affected by Indian women, that of the centre was the most graceful? Behind the polite tones of his voice I seemed to hear an echo of his wife's

good-humoured laughter when he went home to rest after luncheon.

"Fancy what they looked like, in those plain dresses, so ugly and ungraceful, and only a cheap string of beads, which you could buy in the bazaar for a few rupees, round their necks."

I wanted to send a message to her—that we did not look quite as freakish at night, in spite of the short hair. The pity was that the audience with the Rani had not taken place after the banquet at night, instead of in the morning.

In addition to the scent and the garlands, each visitor was given a thick green leaf smeared with gold paint, and on the leaf lay half a dozen nuts washed in gold leaf. Going back to camp, I nibbled at the nuts, and found them quite palatable. When I got out of the car, in front of the drawing-room tent, my mouth was covered with gold paint.

"I hope you are satisfied with your morning?"

"I am not," I replied. "I hoped that Her Highness would have given us *pān* instead of gold nuts."

The Dewan was standing beside us. "Why do you want to eat *pān*?"

"Because, unless I have chewed betel-nut until my tongue is brick-red, I shan't feel that I have really been in India."

"If you will promise to eat it, some shall be prepared for you, and you shall have it while you rest this afternoon."

The others looked dubious. "If you make her sick, Dewan Sahib, she won't be able to go to the fair, or to the banquet at night."

"I shan't be sick," I said stoutly.

That afternoon, while I was preparing for my rest, a servant came, carrying some large green leaves covered with a paste of a thick red consistency and small chips of nut.

"What do I do, Farman Shah?"

"You eat it all, Miss Sahib, leaf and all."

"Not the whole leaf as well? Surely you are mistaken!"

"Miss Sahib must eat it all."

"Well, if I die, my death will be at your door."

Farman Shah did not reply. Our relations were strained that afternoon. To begin with, he had failed to dust the tent dressing-tables that morning, and I had pointed out that, although this was a birthday-party for all of us, it did not do to neglect the elementary duties of order and cleanliness. He may also have thought that it was ill-bred of me to want to chew betel-nut.

The *pān* tasted of lime, and was dry on my tongue, and presently I was overpowered with thirst. I would not admit that it was not delicious, so I lay and nibbled, under a mosquito-net, until sleep overcame me. When Farman Shah returned at three-thirty, the mercury in the thermometer on my table pointed to 94°, and my mouth was a bright brick-red. Fortunately, I am fond both of red and of heat, and presently, having put on a clean silk frock, I went very gaily out into the blazing sunshine.

The *mela* was at the other side of the city, and, except that the colours were brilliant and crude, and the women wore wide skirts of some bright red, and tightly fitting *brassières* that left bare a strip of bronzed skin between the two garments, and their ankles and wrists were hung with coarse silver ornaments, the fair was just such a one as might be seen in any small town of Europe.

Beyond the fair, a marquee had been erected in front of a large platform, that was sheltered from the thick yellow sunshine by a group of tall trees. A banner was hung from the trees, and, in gold letters, I read : " Platform of All Religions." The State prided itself on its liberal principles, and each year the platform was built whereon Hindu, Muslim, and Christian met together in a rare spirit of goodwill and equality.

As I sat down in the marquee, I wished that Farman Shah was there. Not that I was optimistic enough to believe that his prejudices would melt in the genial light of tolerance and truth that emanated from the platform. Over the heads of the men on the platform hung texts, written in three languages. The English letters varied in size ; and though " God is

Love" was entirely successful, "GoD is EVERywHere" was rather uneven, and the third sentence was, at first glance, unreadable :

BE PUREINT HOU
GHT WORDAN DEED

It took me several minutes to make it out, especially as one of the *d*'s was missing.

A group of Jains, with cloths covering their mouths, lest, by swallowing a fly, they inadvertently took life, sat in the extreme left corner. In the centre of the platform stood the secretary, a plump, bland gentleman dressed in a black and gold velvet robe. He was flanked by important members of each creed. The Muslims sat on the right, and the Hindus on the left. Behind the Hindus there was a group of ash-covered Sadhus. In turn, each body "put up a prayer" or sang a hymn. The secretary made a speech, and the chief guest replied.

As the chief guest sat down, every man on the platform rose simultaneously. I had a fleeting thought that the platform of all religions was going to end in a free fight. But, as it seemed, out of the ether, or out of the woodwork of the platform, garlands were produced as if by magic. A moment before, there had not been so much as a blade of grass on the platform, and now, in an instant, every man held a garland of tuberose. It was the more astonishing that all the Sadhus had contrived to produce garlands, since it is quite impossible to conceal more than a single rose under the scanty red sashes that were their only covering.

The religions poured simultaneously off the platform in a wild endeavour to reach the chief guest first. Fortunately he was a stalwart man, and stood his ground manfully. We were all garlanded, and most of us had at least three chains hung round our necks. But the chief guest was so heaped up with garlands that he could hardly stand, and it is to his eternal credit that he managed to preserve his dignity as he tottered under the weight of a mass of flowers that temporarily made

him look like the lid of a coffin. His last garland was put on by the most inadequately clad Sadhu, whose small bright-pink sash, enormous chignon of hair over his left ear, and his grey-white ash-powdering were far more suggestive of the Paris music-halls than of the ascetic life.

My eyes were fixed upon the incongruous pair. For a moment the coffin-lid and the Folies-Bergère chorus-girl looked solemnly into each other's faces. Then, before I brought disgrace upon the front row, the Raja's officials began hustling the crowd about, and a move was made toward the cars. I held my breath, thinking that I could have my laugh out in the fair.

The smell of the garlands seemed to have penetrated into the palace gardens. The air was hot and torpid, but the sound of the tennis-balls bounding on the burnt grass, and the rattle of tea-cups, reminded the English of hot days at home. The palace band played selections of old-fashioned popular songs : "Black-Eyed Susan," and "The Mountains of Mourne." A far-away look came into the eyes of the older men, as if they were seeing, not the white stucco walls of the palace beyond the trees that edged the tennis-courts, not the yellow puggaris of the palace servants, but themselves—when their world was very young, and London smelled of horses, and women wore black open-work thread stockings.

Slowly the air began to cool. The tennis-players settled down in earnest to their game ; cigarettes and chocolates replaced the plates of birthday cake, and the band was playing "The Merry Widow Waltz." The Dewan's open touring-car was standing behind the trees in the drive behind the palace. Presently, three of us escaped with him away from the band and the gossip and the tennis-players.

Out beyond the palace grounds the car joined a straight dusty road with scrub country on both sides. Miles along the straight road the car sped to where the edge of the plateau dropped down into the plain below. It was strange, fascinating, dun-coloured country, like rolling downs, and the plain

below might have been the ocean, so still was it and so devoid of life.

There seemed no reason why the car should not have been driven down into the plain and continued its journey for ever, except that we had all, including the Dewan, to be dressed and at the palace, for the banquet, by half past eight. Reluctantly the order to turn was given. Instead of returning along the road, the car took a track on the right, and was driven steadily over the uneven ground towards the sunset. About eight miles from the edge of the plateau there was a valley, wooded and green, and in the ravine, built against a hollow in its rocky side, was an old Hindu temple.

"Even in the hot weather," the Dewan said, "it is always a cool, green solitude, this. Every Sunday afternoon, when I am free, I motor myself out here, and bring my books, and spend some hours reading."

"What a perfect place to have within your reach !"

"It is everyone's favourite. His Highness comes here for picnics. He and his children love it very much."

A broad flight of steps led down to the court in the centre of the temple. There were rooms under the terrace that had been built up at the top of the steps for the priest.

"If I were a priest, I should like to serve at this temple. It is one of the loveliest places I've ever seen."

"Would you not be afraid of the cobras and the panthers? And would you not be lonely, so far from any living creature?"

"Not if I were a priest."

"Do you think that perfect faith casts out both fear and loneliness?"

"You should know that better than I, Dewan Sahib."

"I am not a priest, either," he replied.

The Bhils were returning from the *mela*, walking slowly across the scrub country, in groups of threes and fours, on their way to some invisible habitation in that bare, relentless world.

"How do they manage to subsist in a country like this?"

“ To all intents and purposes, they don’t.”

“ Their wants are few and easily satisfied,” the Dewan said quietly.

It was dark as we drove through the city. The shops were open, and the lighted *buttis* swung in the doorways. Groups of men, talking as they squatted, their voices sounding mellow in the cool evening air, watched us with grave, incurious eyes as we drove by. Children played, in the dust, with the pie dogs, and bullocks ambled, at their own sweet will, along the roads. At one corner, two camels, with packs, were tethered to a tree. Already, after two days, the city had a home-like air that was sweet and friendly. “ I love this place,” I said involuntarily.

“ His Highness is going to build a petrol-pump over in that corner.”

“ Oh, no ! He mustn’t ! How utterly barbarous of him ! ”

The Dewan laughed. “ Surely not barbarous ? It is very inconvenient having no stores of petrol here.”

“ You oughtn’t to have cars at all. A place like this is perfect as it is. You’ll spoil it all if you change it.”

“ Without cars, you could not have had your drive to-night.”

As the car stopped in front of the drawing-room tent, I said : “ A night like this has nothing to do with either logic or common sense.”

It was the small hours of the morning. Behind us, like a bewilderingly coloured tapestry, the night stretched with its pattern of banquet, speeches, crackers, conjuror, and garlanding. We were at the theatre again, and, at that moment, there seemed to have been almost no pause for rest between this performance and the performance of last night. It was like a reel of a film, and this was the last few hundred feet. The same chubby little boys bounced and pirouetted on the stage ; the same ugly, lanky youth played the heroine’s part with remarkable power, only, to-night, he was Krisna’s wife. Sivaji the second had discarded his long

black beard, and had painted himself blue, in order to represent the incarnation. The play that had been patriotic was now religious, but, if the Dewan had not told us, we should never have noticed that there was any difference.

In the large, imposing leather arm-chair of the Raja, a sleeping Englishman reclined. Beyond him sat Clare and the Heir Apparent, with his brother and his tutor. Beyond the Dewan, on a sofa, three young Thakors whispered together, their coats and flowing puggaris gleaming palely in the twilight of the auditorium. The more sedate members of the party had gone to bed, exhausted after the conjuror's performance.

"You have a great many religious plays in India?" I asked the Dewan.

"Yes, they are popular with the people. When you go back to England, would you like to write a book about the theatre in India?"

"Hardly, after seeing only two performances."

"What have you made out about India, Miss Sahib?"

"I have made out that I love it."

"If you really love India, why don't you stay? Already you are talking of going Home, and yet you love it. Not many British ladies really love India. They love the position and the gaiety, all that India gives them, and, when they go Home at last, they are unhappy in England, because they find that they have lost the space and the importance that they had here. They become one of a herd, and that makes them long to be back in this country. But that is not loving India, that is loving power. If you really love India, and you say you are not afraid of heat, you should stay always here."

"I have to go back to England."

"Surely there is no 'have to,' if you wish to stay?"

"You are a Hindu, Dewan Sahib, and, if I tell you I am needed by my family, you will surely agree that there is nothing more to be said."

"No, I can say no more, if that is the case."

A troupe of small boys thundered on to the stage, with grinning, painted mouths, and bunches of pink roses in their hands. When the noise of the ballet was over, the Dewan said :

“ How are you going to communicate your love of India to others ? There is no use only saying that you have found much to love, because nobody will listen to you.”

“ I am no politician, if you mean that.”

“ Very well. But, putting his political views entirely apart—and I think that you must admit, even you who so dislike politics, that he is a factor that cannot be entirely ignored in the world—putting, as I said, his political views entirely apart, do you look upon Gandhi as evil to the heart, or do you admit that his private life is saintly ? ”

“ Putting his politics apart, I have always realised his saintliness. I’ve often wondered what the judgment of history will be regarding both Lenin and Gandhi—apart from whether one thinks them misguided, there can be no question of their sincerity.”

“ If Miss Sahib is no politician,” the Dewan said drily, “ I do not think we want to begin a discussion on the comparative merits or demerits of two political leaders.” After a moment, he added : “ You say you love India. I wonder if you have come to realise the most important factor about the life of the Indian.”

“ What is that ? ”

“ It is something that most British people fail to realise. They can spend a lifetime of service in this country, and then they go Home without ever having grasped it. Or, if they do grasp it, it is as a cold fact having nothing to do with themselves, and, by their unsympathetic misunderstanding of it, it is as if they had not grasped it at all. I mean the fact that, to us, religion is the central reality of our lives. Do you realise that at all, Miss Sahib ? ”

I thought of the Dewan at Mandū, of his words on Hinduism, and of my own experience that first night on the terrace of the Chhappan Mahall. I remembered the eyes of

the old man in the Chandni Chauk at Delhi, and, above all, I remembered my holy man at the Nil Kanth Palace.

"Yes, Dewan Sahib, it is the only thing that I have realised about India."

"We are not a material people. We have no real craving for material greatness. You in the West, who have your wealth and your perfectly appointed mechanical civilisation that brings to every man a high standard of living, you despise this country as tawdry and ragged. You see poverty and inequality, and you are shocked. What is it that is always said of us? 'Jewelled Maharajas and skinny horses.' But what you do not realise is, that India has something within herself that the poorest peasant may have, that gives contentment to all her people—and that is, the vision of God. Do you know why so few of the British can grasp that? It is because the West has not that vision. Philosophy has been relegated to a few eccentric students, and religion is no longer a living force in Europe.

"If a man is not interested in his own religion, he can hardly be expected to take notice of another's. But, Miss Sahib—and please do not think I speak unkindly—is it not also that it is very difficult for an ordinary Englishman to"—he paused—"to see anybody else's point of view but his own?"

"I am afraid you are right," I said.

"Come; do not look unhappy. Every man is not ordinary. It was an Englishman who said: 'India is a pilgrim of eternity who has set out on her search for the Eternal. She has laid aside the glory of the world and taken up the robe of Sannyasi. Others who are satisfied with earthly riches may despise her in her poverty and tattered robes. But the true children of India, who can be satisfied with nothing but the Truth itself, will revere even the tattered robe of their mother as she goes on her pilgrimage seeking not earthly riches but the vision of God Himself.'"

Against a drop-curtain painted to represent a forest glade, Krisna, with his blue face, was singing that into the

bosom of one great sea flow streams from hills on every side.

“Remember,” said the Dewan, “this one thing : You have been living among princes, and you have seen their power, and you have seen the extraordinary reverence that their subjects pay to them. Do not be blinded by this into thinking that the peoples of India worship at the thrones of the princes. The service that they pay to their masters is a service of the lips, a rendering, shall I say, in the words of your Bible, to Cæsar of those things that are Cæsar’s. The real reverence of India has always been for the Sadhu, for the holy man who has given up the power of the material world in order to seek after the Truth.”

“What is Truth, Dewan Sahib ? ”

“For you, I don’t know, Miss Sahib. But, for India, Truth is God.”

CHAPTER XI

DAWN AT AJMER

“MISS SAHIB, you must wake up.”

I opened my eyes. Farman Shah was standing between the carriage seats, rubbing his hands together. Above the noise of the narrow-gauge train I heard the bang of the door that connected the compartment with the servants'. As the train lurched over the rails, the door banged in unison. I turned my head away.

“Miss Sahib. It is a quarter to five.”

With a deep breath I raised my head from my dusty pillow. “Are we nearly there?”

“Yes, Miss Sahib. I come back in ten minutes to pack the bedding-rolls.”

It was quite dark when the train reached Ajmer. Still half asleep, we stumbled down on to the platform. A dozen chattering coolies began pulling our luggage out of the carriage. The platform was crowded with Indians, who were pouring out of the train.

“No wonder there was so much noise through the night. I never heard such a row ; you could hear them talking even above the roar of the train.” I shivered as I spoke, and drew my tweed coat round me. It was the cold, dark hour before the dawn.

“They are saying, Miss Sahib, that we must cross the bridge. The train will come in at other platform.”

A few dim *buttis* hung above the opposite platform, casting fitful pools of light round the doors into the station offices ; otherwise the darkness held us in a chill embrace. Dazed with sleep, we moved forward, with the stream of Indians, on to the bridge and down the stairs to the other platform.

Here the stream was dammed by the recumbent figures that slept oblivious of the noise about them. We stood in the crowd, our individuality merged into the common whole. Presently, the coolies, carrying the luggage, came shouting and panting across the line. Farman Shah cleared a space on the platform, and our boxes were put down beside us.

I sat down on my tin-lined trunk, and put my elbows on my knees and my chin in my hands, and ruminated.

Presently I heard a cough above my head, and, looking up, I met the accusing glance of Farman Shah.

"Life is like a slot-machine," I said. "Unless you put a coin into the hole, you can't pull anything out of the drawer. And as most people are unprepared to put anything into life, they get nothing out of it in return."

"Miss Sahib"—there was a trace of authority in his voice—"Miss Sahibs no must sit here. They go in waiting-room, and have *chota hasri*."

"Go away, Farman Shah. Leave us alone. We are going to sit out here. Go and have tea yourself."

He went away, muttering, shocked that his Miss Sahib should prefer a dirty, crowded platform to the stuffy seclusion of the waiting-room.

My thoughts returned to the slot-machine. It was true of life: the more you gave, the more you got. From the moment that I had landed in India, until three days ago, I had given as much as lay within my power, and, looking back, it seemed as if I had been repaid out of all proportion. Until three days ago—the fact was, that I had been living at too high pressure, and suddenly, as I stepped out of the train at Udaipur, something had gone snap, and I had been too limp to give anything to Udaipur, and, consequently, Udaipur had given me nothing.

Looking back over the early, hurried breakfast in the birthday camp, over the drive across country to the nearest railway station—where good-bye was said to the friend who had been our companion since our arrival in the States—it seemed as if the strange mood of exultation that the pain

of parting usually engenders had lasted throughout the long, hot journey to Udaipur. With the leaving of the train, and the stepping on to the platform, I was possessed with that sense of numb unreality. I had chosen Udaipur rather than Benares because I had neither the time nor the money to visit both. If I could only have recovered some of those many rupees that had been squandered so blithely in the first weeks in the Seda Bazaar—— I had no desire to go as a tripper to Benares. If I went, it must be to the Kashi of the Hindus ; and, so far, no Hindu had shown any inclination to invite me to Kashi. Besides, in England, it had been to Udaipur that my heart turned. “ At least I shall see that before I die.”

Well, here I was in Udaipur, and my fatigue was such that I only longed for a quiet bed and sleep.

The Maharana had lent us a car and a chauffeur for the duration of our visit. As it turned out of the station road, the clean night air touched our faces, and we were acutely aware of his kindness. Two men sat in the front seat, and, suddenly, one spoke loudly over his shoulder :

“ Miss Sahibs, Udaipur is the Venice of the East. It is a city of wharves and bridges. From the tiers of marble steps that lead down to the lake, you listen to the sound of lapping water. The surface of the lake is studded with islands, and from these, looking back at the palace, you have a vision of marble cupolas and trellis-work. Imagine all this, Miss Sahibs, and you will realise that I do not exaggerate when I tell you that the Venice of the East is an earthly Paradise.”

The voice ceased suddenly, and I said : “ Thank you very much.” Aside, I added to Clare : “ How kind of the Maharana to send that man to tell us all about the place.”

“ To-morrow,” the voice continued, in ordinary conversational tones, “ Miss Sahibs will no doubt be visiting the palace.”

“ Yes, I believe it has been all arranged. —— Sahib, and —— Sahib’s Memsahib have kindly said that they will take us round.”

There was a silence for a moment. Then there was a mutter in the front seat, and the car stopped. "Good night, Miss Sahib," the voice said coldly, and the car went on.

"I wonder why the name of those people had such an extraordinary effect?"

"That was only a common guide, who vanished the moment he found we didn't need him."

I sighed. A small wind of unfriendliness seemed to stir the trees by the edge of the road.

The guest-house was enormous, silent, and dark. The *babu* in charge came forward and shook hands. He said that the train was late as usual, hoped that we would be comfortable, and shambled off. I never saw him again. The large, empty dining-room was cheerless, and, remembering the friends we had left and the weeks of happiness and experience that lay behind us, I thought: "One pays for everything"; And, as we followed the *khidmatgar* up the whitewashed stair to the upper verandah, I added, mentally, "with compound interest."

Farman Shah was fussing between the two communicating rooms. He had plenty to say, and he said it.

"Now, listen," I interposed. "For the last few weeks we've all been living above the world. To-night we've come down to earth. This is life again, and it's just got to be lived, and it makes it much worse to talk about it, or to think about it. The Maharana is descended from the Sun, and for him to entertain two insignificant tourists and their miserable servant is enough to make us all go down on our knees in gratitude here on the carpet. Now, that'll do; get on with your work."

The moment, however, came when Farman Shah said:

"I am going now, Miss Sahib."

"The servants' go-downs are at the back? Are they far away?"

"Yes, Miss Sahib; far away."

"The guest-house is very large and silent."

"No one stay here but Miss Sahibs. Guest-house is empty."

Babu has house next door. But Miss Sahibs safe ; *chokidar* keep watch. To-morrow, if Miss Sahibs like, I am bringing my bedding, and will sleep on sofa on verandah."

When he had gone I went out on to the verandah, and looked across a dark hollow at the twinkling lights of the city. The guest-house stood on some rising ground, and the city seemed to rise up into the sky on the slope of the opposite hill. There was a sound of drums and human voices, singing. I leant my hands on the verandah parapet, and I thought that this was Udaipur, and I was filled with an uneasy sense, that was neither fear nor sorrow nor dismay, but which partook of all three. I returned to the bedrooms, and shut the doors and bolted them.

"I hate Udaipur," I said.

"You are tired to death," replied Clare practically.

The next morning, the feeling persisted. We awoke to a brilliant, sparkling day, and our blood ran quick with the knowledge that we were more than 2,000 feet above sea-level. It was hot, and yet we felt it not in that light, dry air. The sun streamed into the verandah, and, pushing aside one of the *chicks*, I looked out upon the city.

The sons of the Sesodia Dynasty, whose boast it is that the founder of their race sprang from the loins of the Sun God, and that they have never tainted the purity of their blood with a single marriage with a Muslim, knew how to place a city. Surrounded by a bare, brown range of harsh mountains lies a valley where the wilderness has blossomed. In the valley there is a chain of lakes, whose banks are thick with palm-trees, acacia, plantains, feathery jungle grass, and the purple flowers of the wistaria. On the edge of the largest lake the Pichola, a city of marble palaces, watches its reflections in the silver waters that wash against its foundations. Behind the marble towers and minarets, the narrow streets of the city press close, street upon street of small open booths, where the goldsmith, the silversmith, the silk merchant, sit at work. Broad marble steps lead, under carved archways, from the palace down to the water. Up and down these steps

walk women, carrying water-pots of polished brass and copper, and the air is filled with the faint tinkle of their anklets, and the chastened sound of the water lapping against the steps.

Through the Hattie Pol (Elephant Gate) the narrow crowded streets led past the Jagdish Temple, and the peering faces of the crowd were dispassionate in their appraising stare. Flies buzzed about the booths, a Brahmin bull ambled by, and a Rajput passed us, carrying his strange curved sword. The palace stables, built in the vast containing wall of the foundations, had young elephants to show, as well as horses, for our entertainment. Yet the feeling persisted, through the city, through the palace, out into the boat that waited, rocking gently, at the foot of the marble steps.

"If this goes on," I thought, "I shall begin to think that I am afraid, actually afraid, out in all this burning sunshine."

Yet I had known fear in Peshawar, and I loved Peshawar; I had known fear when the animal's eyes blazed at me in a tent at Mandū; and part of myself was for ever left behind me in Mandū, so that I loved Mandū with that love which is possession, and yet is not possessive.

From the palace on the island, where the Maharana of the time gave asylum to the British women during the Mutiny, we looked back across the gleaming water, and saw the proud white walls of the massive marble palace dominating the world with a cold, serene arrogance. I knew that Udaipur was an ecstasy to those who accepted its embrace. But I shut my heart, and saw that its architecture was bad, and I remembered the fort at Delhi, and I felt that this beauty pertained to the baker's shop, and its marble was like white sugar instead of old lace.

I had been told that to dream away the morning in silence among the ruins and the flowers of the island garden was to taste a happiness that comes rarely in this world. But there was no silence round me, only the merry prattling of voices, and the dream, if there had been one, would have been a nightmare.

I walked behind the others, and I tore to pieces the spray of orange-blossom that the old women in charge of the garden had picked for me, and my heart was troubled.

At evening, before sunset, we drove out to the end of the lake to the Khas Odi, and, sitting on the terrace wall, watched the feeding of the herd of grey sacred pigs. The distant white palaces rose out of an opal lake and the brown hills turned to purple. Beyond the squeaking pigs, the impersonal silence that nature assumes at night was travelling down the hills. "What have I to do with turbulence or unrest?" it said; and, listening, I thought that here was beauty.

It was on the way back from the feeding of the pigs that I expressed our wish to visit Chitor. It was met with blank discouragement.

"Perhaps we could go to-morrow, in the car?"

"There is no road. It is out of the question."

"Then we might get out at Chitorgarh, on our way to Jaipur, get a car, and drive out to the fort."

"Your train goes straight to Ajmer. You don't change."

"But if we went by a morning train, got out at Chitorgarh, we could get the evening train to Ajmer."

"It would not be worth your while. There is nothing to see. You saw the fort in the distance—when you changed at Chitorgarh coming here."

"Yes, we saw the fort on the top of the hill. I liked the way the hill suddenly towered out of the plain, and the brown line of the fort along its summit was beautiful. Akbar's capture of it is a thrilling story. The women of Jaimall Rathor, preferring death by fire to falling into his hands, and all the other women fighting side by side with the men, until nearly all were massacred, is one of the epics of history. I should like to stand in the fort myself."

There was no reply.

That evening, in the guest-house, I said to Clare: "Now what do you suppose is kept in the Fort of Chitor?"

“ Why should you imagine there is anything there ? ”

“ Because, when people assure you that there is nothing to see, and are at the same time determined that you shall not investigate for yourself, you are forced to conclude that there is a great deal to be seen.”

“ Well, what do you suppose it is ? ”

“ Do you remember how the hill rose abruptly out of the plain ? Do you remember the railway-line from Chitorgarh, and how we stopped at a tiny station where grey monkeys leapt about the train, and we wondered if they'd put long arms through the windows and steal our things ? The hillside from Chitor fell straight down behind the station, and then rose again at the other side of the station. You felt as if, by standing on the top of the train and stretching out your arms, you could almost touch the mountain on either side. That gap is the only entrance into Udaipur, I believe.”

“ Well, and what of it ? ”

“ I'm just thinking that, if you are descended from the Sun, you are apt to take long views of life. I wonder, do they sometimes think that it is possible that the British raj may one day leave India ? And after that——”

“ Then you think Chitor is full of——”

“ Yes, just boring things like ammunition and big guns. I don't want to see them, I'm sure. And, that being so, the train to Jaipur might just as well take us to-morrow evening as the next.”

“ But we accepted to stay three nights.”

“ The Italians have a proverb : ‘ A guest is like a dead fish ; after three days, he stinks.’ You and I shall not be a dead fish to the Maharana.”

The narrow-gauge train rocked over the rails. The dining-car, a small box-like compartment, was over a wheel. It took us a long time to eat the six courses that were brought, as the food fell off the forks before we could get it into our mouths. The Anglo-Indian manager stood beside our table and talked. We were the only Europeans on the train, and the only people dining. The manager had sad eyes, and an

uncertain manner ; once he had begun to talk, he did not seem able to leave off.

“ It has been such a bad year for business. No one seems to travel. Or, if they travel, they bring their food with them. No one comes to the dining-car.”

I said that it was a mistake ; and I praised the dinner, and I added that business was bad everywhere.

“ It is not that ; it is the loneliness.”

After we had finished eating, there was still twenty minutes before the train stopped at the next station. The manager unpacked a box, and showed us his treasures : coloured pictures of Rajput chiefs, and views of India, and photographs of his family. When the train stopped, he walked along the platform with us to our compartment, lest harm should befall us in the dark.

“ Good night, ladies,” he said ; “ and thank you for being kind to a lonely man.” He handed us a small parcel, done up in white paper. In the parcel were two muslin handkerchiefs, and on one was stamped a blue elephant, and on the other a pink.

One of the recumbent figures stirred and sighed at my feet. I raised my chin from my hands and looked about me. Clare was asleep, with her head propped against a bedding-roll. Farman Shah squatted behind the pile of luggage.

Beyond the station *buttis*, the world was touched with cool grey light. There was a high hill in the distance that rose out of the plain to the eastward. Presently, like Horatio, I saw the morning in his russet mantle walk slowly over the dew of that hill beyond the station go-downs. The figures stirred beside me, and sat up. From the trees the mina-birds began to call, and the air grew warm as the sun rose. The life of India had begun again, after its brief night's rest. For a moment it was as if my fingers touched its pulse and I felt its heart-beats as my own.

Presently the mail train steamed into the station, and I rose and said : “ I am ready now.”

• We went forward and found our places, and the luggage

was put in, and Farman Shah went to the servants' carriage.

As the train bore us towards Jaipur, I was thinking that Government Houses, and the memory of them, would pass away ; that balls and expeditions, and the misnamed fever of delight, would be as if they had never been. But that dawn at Ajmer will remain with me for ever. For it is of such simple stuff that the most important moments of life are made : just a sunrise behind a hill, or a few words spoken outside an underground tube station.

CHAPTER XII

THE LAST RIDE OF MR. DAS

THE ROSE-RED CITY OF JAIPUR has earned a reputation for modernity and vulgarity. It was built two hundred years ago, by a Maharaja who was a reformer with a passion for science and geometrical design. He built his city in the plain, and he planned it as an American city is planned. Broad avenues are intersected at right angles by other avenues ; narrow streets run parallel to the avenues. It is a city of gates, and at regular intervals open circular spaces add to the sense of light and air. The Maharaja dreamt of a city built entirely of rose-coloured sandstone. There was not, apparently, enough sandstone to go round ; consequently, many of the buildings are made of red stucco. The reforming prince realised that not only is light and air necessary to the health of a town, but water also ; therefore, down every street there are water-taps, bringing pure water within the reach of the poorest citizen.

Since, however, no less a person than a Viceroy described Jaipur as a rose-red sham, it has been the fashion to dismiss it as a crude flaunting of modernity. My eyes, that had found the confectioner's window display at Udaipur, looked in vain for modernity at Jaipur. But then, like the Maharaja, I am probably vulgar.

Sacred monkeys chattered from the trees ; peacocks cried under our windows ; parrots spread their green wings, and flew, screeching, overhead. At every street corner, elephants, with silver and gold embroidered howdahs, swung their trunks as they lurched slowly along, and each man wore a puggari more vivid and brilliant than his neighbour's.

Driving down a narrow street, in an open phæton, towards the brass factory, Farman Shah turned suddenly in horror :

“ Oh, Miss Sahibs ! Horrid dirty smell. Your handkerchiefs, quick ! ” And, to his own sensitive Pathan nose, he held his handkerchief. It seemed to me that there was plenty of colour and charm, not to speak of old-fashioned dirt, left at Jaipur.

The history of Jaipur State, known to the ancients as Matsya Desh, begins with the Five Pandava brothers, who spent the last years of their exile somewhere among the low, green hills that circle the plain. Seven miles from the modern capital, up among the hills, Amber, the deserted, stands silent and exquisite. He had his reason, the geometrically minded Maharaja, for abandoning the old city in the hills in order to build the rose-red town in the plain. Standing on the purdah roof-garden, looking from the dead houses that were slowly crumbling on the slopes of the hills, and in the valley between, out over the circling mountains to where they opened suddenly to the leftward and the plain flowed in like the sea, it was hard to reconcile the desire for progressive reform with a conscience that could wantonly desert the quiet beauty of the past.

“ Look,” I said. “ That gap in the hills is the old road where Akbar marched to conquer Rajputana. There are towers still standing to-day on the hills, where they lit the beacons each night. Think of that—beacons lit from Rajputana to Delhi, to let his people know that he was well, and prospering on his march.”

“ Who told you that ? ”

“ The old guide at the hotel. He is a remarkably intelligent man, and I believe every word he tells me.”

“ Do you always believe everything you are told ? ”

“ By no means. I seldom believe in anything as arbitrary as facts.” Then, with an abrupt change of tone, I added : “ I should like to ride out there between the mountains. It was lonely country when Akbar came, and it is lonely country to-day. That is why I love Indian country ; it is

lonely and full of space. English country is never lonely ; it is merely dull and full of snobs."

Going down the hillside from Amber, I yielded my place on the elephant to Farman Shah. He had never sat on an elephant in his life, and he thought his Miss Sahib the most angelic being on earth. Actually my motive was one of supreme selfishness. The journey up had been enough for me.

My companion led me down the hillside by a short straight path. It was the hottest hour of the day, and the sun beat pitilessly down on to my sun-umbrella.

"You were right," he said, "about the country out there being lonely. It is—gloriously lonely, you say. Well, sometimes it is ingloriously so.—That man you sat next, at dinner, the Indian on your left—what did you think of him?"

"I liked him. He had a sense of humour, and he was clever and a good talker. He was easy to get on with. I'm afraid that I didn't hear what his name was."

"Never mind his name. We'll call him Mr. Das. Das is a very common name in India, and it will serve our purpose. You say you don't believe in facts. Now I am going to give you some. . . .

"Mr. Das was the son of a rich, influential father. At an early age he gave promise of being an exceptionally intelligent man. He was sent to England, and educated first at school and then at Oxford. He made friends easily, and, being adaptable and sensible, soon accommodated himself to Western life and thought. When the time came to return to India, he left Europe with many regrets. He had been happy, and he had learned to appreciate the freedom of speech and action that he saw practised in the West. The thought of returning to the close family life of India filled him with secret consternation. He had read widely, and he had used his eyes and his mind ; and he returned home with one firm conviction : that to observe the strict rules of caste imposed on Hindus regarding marriage was fanatical and ridiculous. For a son to marry at the choice of his father was

degrading to his manhood. Marriage, in any case, was a difficult enough relationship. There was only one way to approach it, and that was by the Western method of free, mutual choice and love. As a boy, he had been betrothed to a child some years his junior. The child had not survived her tenth year, and Mr. Das's father was only waiting for his son's return from England to find him a suitable wife. Mr. Das, as soon as he stepped across the threshold of his home, made it clear that he intended to find his own wife, without the help of his father. The time had come for him to begin life, and to take up his profession. His first post took him to Bombay, and there he lived for several years. The interests of his work, and the opportunity afforded by the city for pleasure and self-indulgence, left him with no time to think of love and marriage. His father, anxiously awaiting the day when he should hear of some imprudent match, saw with satisfaction that his son's life was fully occupied with all the pursuits that were natural to a man of his age and position.

"Meanwhile, Mr. Das was prospering in his work, and a position of importance was found for him in a State at some distance from Bombay. It was the first rung in the ladder, and who knew where he might not end up if he were careful and played his cards well ?

"Then one disastrous day, almost on the eve of his departure, he met the daughter of a Parsi with whom he had had business dealings. She was young ; she was lovely ; she was well informed ; and she was accustomed to the freedom of her father's house. She looked at Mr. Das, out of melting dark eyes, with an expression that was at once shy and friendly. Her manners, her dress, and her jewels were superb. She was the idol of her father's heart, and he was a millionaire. Only in the West could Mr. Das have imagined that a young girl could combine such gentleness with such assurance and dignity. She was free, and yet she was restrained ; she had intelligence, and yet she had deference. She was a Parsi, and, albeit before her father's Hindu

client, she held her head high, as if it were she who condescended.

“ In that first hour, Mr. Das loved her with a love that never wavered till her death. They were married, and, when Mr. Das went to take up his new duties, his Parsi wife went with him.

“ The Parsis are the Jews of India. For the son of an influential high-caste Hindu to marry a Parsi is something worse than for the son of a proud Aryan to marry a Jew in the Germany of Herr Hitler's régime. When Mr. Das's father heard that his son had taken a Parsi girl to wife, he turned his face to the wall. Had he been a modern British father, he might have bluntly said : ‘ Well, that's torn it.’ Being an oriental, he had a great deal to say, and he said it, no doubt, beautifully and eloquently.

“ When Mr. Das and his wife arrived in the State, they found that the hand of every man was against them. The Raja was an orthodox Hindu of the old school, who kept his women in the strictest purdah. It was a disgrace and a shame to him that one of his officials should flaunt about the State with his Parsi wife at his side. Mr. Das had been guilty of a despicable act in marrying a Parsi, and it was the duty of every man to punish him, to force him to realise the consequences of his crime. There are certain follies or temptations that a Hindu may succumb to, and, as it's called, get away with : marrying a Parsi is not one of them.

“ The years passed slowly. Mr. Das did not prosper in his profession. He was lonely, for he was the friend of no man ; even his relations had turned against him. He still loved his wife with a romantic and passionate attachment ; but love, alone, has never satisfied any man. He was ambitious, and he knew that within himself there was force and ability to succeed if he were given the ordinary modicum of chance. But, instead of being allowed a chance, he was handicapped at every turn. There are intrigues about every palace in the world, but the intrigues against him were the more potent in that each ended with the

insinuation : ' What can you expect with a man who is married to a Parsi ? '

" His wife knew that she stood between him and success. She loved him, and, sometimes, she said : ' There is no way out. You must put me aside.'

" There was one member of his family who was loyal to him, and that was a brother whose work had taken him to Jaipur. This brother used to counsel him to take a second wife, a Hindu. But Mr. Das knew that, unless he put his first wife entirely away from him, his enemies would not be satisfied.

" From that time, Mr. Das took his wife to visit the brother at Jaipur, and they were happy away from the palace and the intrigues, and the sense of distrust and suspicion that surrounded them in their own home. They loved the rose-red city, and often they rode away together out into your desolate country beyond Amber, and then, I suppose they remembered only that they were lovers, and were content.

" The time came, at last, when Mr. Das heard that his enemies were trying to oust him from his post, saying that it was unfitting for a prince to have one about him who had broken the rules of caste and married with a Parsi. It was just before Mr. Das set out for Jaipur, and he reached his brother's house with a heavy heart, for, on the journey, he had been thinking that the time had come when he must part from his wife. ' At least,' he thought, ' there is no child to complicate matters.'

" A few days later, he entered his wife's room. She turned to him a radiant face, and put out her hands : ' It has come at last. After all these years, I am sure now that I am with child ! '

" Mr. Das covered his eyes with his hands, and his heart turned to lead as he thought : ' Now they will for ever say : " This man has a living son who is a Parsi." '

" The day before Mr. Das left Jaipur, he and his wife went out together for their usual morning ride. Mr. Das's

brother came to see them start, and, as he was in a particularly merry mood, he twitted them about their departure, and said :

“ ‘ Make the most of your ride. It will be long before you’ll have another ride together.’ For he knew that Mr. Das, in the face of his prince’s disapproval, could not ride with his wife about the State where they lived.

“ Beyond Amber, Mr. Das reined in his horse and he turned to his wife, and he looked into her eyes. I like to think that he said to her then :

“ ‘ Whatever I have done, and whatever I may do, I have only this to say : I have never faltered in my love for you. I shall love you till the end of my life.’

“ Perhaps she returned his look, and replied : ‘ And if I die within the hour, to you I say this : I have loved you since I saw you in my father’s house, and my love will live for ever, long after the fire has consumed my body and my ashes have been scattered to the four winds.’

“ Then they rode on, in silence, into the desolate country.

“ Some hours later, a riderless horse, its flanks heaving, and its coat black with sweat, clattered through the gateway, from the Amber direction, into Jaipur city. It carried a side-saddle, and the stirrup was broken. It was caught before it brought disaster on itself, or to the crowded street. A passer-by recognised it as belonging to the brother of Mr. Das, and it was led to his house. The brother immediately set out towards Amber in his car.

“ About half way between Jaipur and Amber, they met Mr. Das. He was leading his horse. Lying across the saddle was the body of his wife. She had been thrown violently, and in falling had struck the side of her head against some sharp boulders. The horse, he said, had taken fright. The side of the head was caved in. Death had been almost instantaneous.”

There was a short silence. In my hand I held a lump of hard doughy bread with which to feed the elephant.

"Has Mr. Das prospered in his profession since his wife's death?"

"He has prospered finely. He is quite an important man these days. He married, as a second wife, the sister of his brother's wife, a high-caste woman, and they have several children, I believe. He never rides nowadays. He has given up all interest in horses. I understand he doesn't even play polo now."

I said slowly: "I think women are over-sensitive about anniversaries and place associations, but it seems strange that he should come back to Jaipur."

"He is fond of his brother, and his wife likes to see her sister."

"Poor Mr. Das! But, no doubt, his humour has helped him. I thought, last night, it had a sardonic flavour."

My companion's complexion turned slowly to a deep brick-red. "Poor Mr. Das! My God!"

"You are very bitter."

"Bitter! Perhaps I am bitter. But then I happen to remember his first wife."

"After all," I said, looking at the bread in my hand, "if you love a man enough, and you know he loves you, it's not so bad to have your head bashed in by a stone. I mean, there are worse fates than to be killed by a fall from a horse. For instance, it would be worse to know that you had ruined his life and turned his love to slow hatred, or to be supplanted by a Hindu wife."

"Have you ever had your head bashed in?"

"No, never," I replied lightly.

"Then you have no business to speak about it."

The elephant slowly advanced into the courtyard. On either side of the howdah, clinging to the iron rail, sat Clare and Farman Shah.

As we walked towards the elephant, my companion said: "I wonder if any woman has any real sense of morality?"

"If it is immoral to believe that there are certain loves

that transcend death, then I am a most immoral woman. Besides, in the West, people seem incapable of accepting that there are many worse fates than death. Sometimes I think it would be better if each man lost the thing he loved before his love had time to cool."

CHAPTER XIII

THE BEES

A COOL WIND blew along the hotel verandah, striking a sense of chill through my cotton frock. It was early in the morning, and vitality, after a night of travel, was low. Throughout the night we had journeyed far and fast. We had gone to sleep in the thirteenth century and we had awakened to the cold reality of the twentieth. We had left the States and were back again in British India. The Mediæval Dream was over, and the morning, with its harsh light, to my sleep-laden eyes was neither kind nor lovely.

In my hand I held a packet of letters, the accumulation of three mails. The last link with the outside world had been severed the day after I had visited Piplya Tank. Now that we had returned to the twentieth century, the claims of Europe were beginning to press upon me. I looked down at the letters, and I sighed.

A voice beside me said : " And to-morrow afternoon there is a party to meet the members of Toc H, and we hope so much that you'll both come."

" Thank you very much," I replied feebly, and put my hand up to my head.

" That is to say, if you've not made any other plans," he added, mistaking my bewilderment for mute despair, for I had been thinking of the Holi, and the words " Toc H " belonged to a world I had forgotten.

The dining-room was full of Americans, and, on the verandah outside, a man squatted, selling imitation-marble models of the Taj. There had been war between me and Udaipur. The spirit of Udaipur had been alien to mine,

and I had known fear and distrust and moments of a grand, fine hatred. But all the time I had known that if I had been unwilling to give anything to Udaipur, Udaipur despised me and wanted neither my love nor my loyalty.

The atmosphere of the Agra hotel dining-room aroused no antagonism—merely a sense of weariness.

“Agra isn’t India,” I said to Clare ; “it belongs to the world of Cook’s tours.”

“Remember, there is always the telegraph office. We don’t have to stay. Besides, it’s Fatehpur-Sikri we came to see.”

“I am cold,” I said, the following day, as I stepped out of the car. I wished that I had brought a coat.

“It is not cold now,” the guide replied. “Where has Miss Sahib come from ? ”

“I have come from Rajputana.” My voice was proud.

“I am descended from the saint Salim Christi. My ancestors are buried in the great quadrangle. When I die, I also will be near the saint’s tomb.”

“Akbar was a mighty king, and yet he was pleased to bow down and do the bidding of your saint. It is better to have saint’s blood in your veins than royal.”

“Has Miss Sahib saint’s blood ? ”

“No, I have not,” I replied, and I smiled. But, though the guide looked expectantly at me, I did not tell what kind of blood ran in my veins.

Akbar’s deserted red sandstone City of Victory was as spotless as when it rose fresh from the builder’s hands, nearly four hundred years ago. The light, dry air of the plain had preserved the stone ; neither mould nor rust had touched its walls, nor crumbled its arches. It stood, cold and empty, frozen into a desolation that was not death, but sleep ; a strange memorial to a brilliant brain that conceived it at terrific speed and fabulous expense, enjoyed it for a brief time, and then abandoned it, at the whim of a moment, to eternal silence.

“They are telling Miss Sahib that Abkar left the city

because there was no water," the guide said. "But that is not true. There was water here. Plenty of water. Out in the plain beyond the city there was an immense tank. Akbar's Court bathed there in the cool of the evening. There was plenty of water, I know."

"Why did he leave it, then?"

The guide shrugged his shoulders. "He went on the campaign to Kabul, after living here eighteen years. And then—who shall say? Some are saying that the saint asked him to go, because the crowds about the palace and city disturbed his prayers. But that I do not believe. There is room in this land and there is time, and in those days there was money also, for a king to leave one city and to build another, and no one asked the reason why."

In Maryam's house, that they called the Golden House, because its walls were inlaid with gold, the guide pointed to the faded pictures on the walls, which he said were supposed to be of biblical subjects. "Akbar believed in religious toleration. He had three wives, one Muslim, one Hindu, and, they are saying, one Christian."

As we walked towards the Panch Mahall the guide said: "Miss Sahib has never seen anything as wonderful as Fatehpur-Sikri?" As I was silent, he repeated the question.

"I have seen Mandū," I replied at last.

"Is Mandū more wonderful than this? What is Mandū?"

After I had tried to tell him, he said: "When Miss Sahib goes home to England, what is she going to say of the Taj?"

"I shall say nothing at all about the Taj. Everything that is possible to say has been said over and over again. It would be very easy and very cheap to disparage what all the world admires. In the face of its passionate sincerity one must be silent. Besides, it has one of the greatest qualities in the world: it has serenity."

"If Miss Sahib has seen it in moonlight she will understand that many men, on seeing it for the first time, have burst into tears."

"Yes, I saw it by moonlight, and the Jains were burning

their dead on the banks of the Jamna. The air was heavy with melancholy, and, if I had not been overcome with sleep, I should also have succumbed to grief."

"It is not the sorrow of it that makes men cry, but the beauty."

"I am not a man. It is true what has been said, that the Taj symbolises woman. A man seeing it by moonlight sees the symbol of his loved one possessed of all those lovely graces and gentle arts that he most adores. He sees her white and still and yielding, and he longs to take her into his arms, and the beauty of it is too much for him, and he is overcome with tears. But I am a woman myself, and therefore I know that his beloved is subtler far and cleverer than he realises, and much less yielding and altogether more interesting, and so I am filled with no desire to cry."

The guide turned round and spoke to Farman Shah, and Farman Shah replied, no doubt, that if I were mad, it was a harmless madness, and that withal I had a kind heart, even though I could on occasion show temper.

Then, lest I had seemed coldly critical, I added : "I am more interested in people than in monuments. It was the Indians that I came to see, and the peasant in the field, and the woman at the well, are more to me than tombs of kings and queens. And, so far, the only people I have seen at Agra are American tourists."

"Shah Jahan was a man as well as a king, and he built, as well as the Taj, the Moti Masjid."

"Ah ! That is a different story." I thought of the Pearl Mosque in the fort at Agra. We had come in from the mass of red sandstone outside into the white austerity of that cool courtyard, with its rows of arches and carved marble screens. Quietly we had stood while Farman Shah prayed, and then we had come away, silenced by its beauty.

"Shah Jahan was a great builder, and he was a great lover. The Taj was inspired by the sick misery of a king whose universe had suddenly broken round him. When he built the tomb for Mumtaz-i-Mahal, he cared for only one thing, and that was that his wife's tomb should be the

most wonderful in the world. Don't think us ungrateful. The mistakes of a great lover are always forgiven."

In the vast quadrangle in front of the Jama Masjid stood the tomb of the saint. To the right of the *masjid*, in the centre of the south side of the courtyard, the enormous entrance-arch, the Buland Darwaza, dominated the quadrangle. The Gate of Victory is the largest and finest of the Moghul gateways. From the pavement outside, the view over the plain stretches for mile upon mile of bare, dusty ground, until it melts at last into the skyline.

Akbar built that gate to commemorate his victory over Southern India. Later, a carved inscription was added to one of the jambs of the doorway. The inscription reads : " Said Jesus, on whom be peace ; ' The world is a bridge, pass over it, but build no house there. He who hopes for an hour hopes for eternity. The world is but an hour. Spend it in devotion. The rest is unseen.' "

Four years after those words were carved, Akbar was dead.

The guide read the words aloud, and he added piously : " No man knows the hour."

I walked through the doorway quickly and stepped out on to the pavement beyond. But I never saw the view over the plain, because suddenly the air was thick with bees. Looking down at the pavement, I saw that it was alive with moving brown bodies.

" Miss Sahib," I heard behind me, " be calm. Show no fear. Pretend that you do not see them. And, above all, do not tread on one. Oh ! be careful ! "

I picked my way on tiptoe back across the pavement, through the Victory Gateway, into the quadrangle. Then I looked at the guide, and I saw that he had been afraid.

" Bees are the enemy of man in India. You were in danger."

" If I had trodden on one, what then ? "

" They would have attacked you. You would have been killed."

" Akbar had four years, but I should have had just four minutes."

CHAPTER XIV

THE HOLI

WE ARRIVED IN LUCKNOW for the merry week of the Holi. It was unfortunate that we should have contrived to reach that particular town during that festival. It may not be an edifying spectacle to watch a group of young Hindus pouring streams of red ink over each other ; but, on the other hand, I should have liked to have asked one of my Hindu acquaintances for an intelligent explanation of the custom. There was that in the air of Lucknow that made me realise that I should be well advised not to let the word " Holi " pass my lips. During our visit, the roads ran with rivers of red and blue ink, and the young men who passed us had their garments dyed with these pleasing hues. Farman Shah had plenty to say on the subject, and it was not always easy to shut our ears to his remarks.

I had come to Lucknow for two reasons : I had been told that at one time the Kings of Oudh wore wigs and satin knee-breeches, and aped the Georgian manners of England. I had also been told, by the Hindus, that Lucknow was the Paris of the East. Thus, fortified by misrepresentation, I arrived to find that no one could tell me aught of lace ruffles or satin coats, and that the spiritual resemblance to Paris began and ended in the lively imagination of the States.

On board ship, the talk had one day turned to the Mutiny, and a man had accused me, saying : " You moderns think that the Mutiny is only a name. There is not one among you to whom it means anything at all."

In self-defence, I replied : " A whole generation of those

born since 1914 have grown up to whom the world war is barely even a name."

"I no understand," Farman Shah said, the day after our arrival. "What is Mutiny?"

"Fancy his never having heard of the Mutiny!" they exclaimed. Then they proceeded to tell him in his own language. If I had not been too proud, I should have asked them to tell the tale in English, because I knew little more about the Mutiny than Farman Shah. Owing to an accident of birth that gave me British blood and an English home, my education was conducted on the conventionally haphazard method. I moved from school to school, and, yearly, from form to form. Having chanced to be born in a certain year, I contrived to "do" the reign of Charles the Second three times. I have no regrets on that score, since Charles the Second is one of the few people for whom I would gladly have laid down my life. But my acquaintance with English history ended abruptly with the Reform Bill of 1832, and when the time came for my parents to cease to pay large school-fees, and for me to begin on a course of self-education, my interest, I found, in Indian history ceased with the formation of the East India Companies.

Two scraps of information relating to the Mutiny I had gleaned in childhood. One was that my grandfather's brother had been killed at Delhi, and the other, that once, in the early childhood of my mother's generation, some descendants of the Vincent Crummleses had performed, in a small village hall in Scotland, a thrilling drama entitled *The Relief of Lucknow*. The memory of those absurd strolling players was dear to my relations. The creaking boards, the minute platform, the pathetic company, and their ambitious play, belonged to an age that had been killed by the cinema and the social-uplift of the stage. From my first years I was familiar with an imitation of the elderly English voice crying: "Ae, Georgie, dinna ye hear the pipes?"

That such a scene had any existence beyond the private traditions of my family never entered my child's head. When

I found myself listening to the story, told vividly for our benefit in the cold cellars of the ruined Residency at Lucknow, and when I heard of the dying Scotch girl and that the Campbells actually did come, I was in that state which is popularly described as being within the power of the feather. At home I had been accustomed to accept the story with laughter. But here in the Residency, there was no laughter, only the memory of tragedy and tears, and of a quiet endurance that turned the most commonplace material into the heroic mould.

Silently I walked up the cold stairs out into the heat of the Residency garden. I was filled with bewilderment, for, since coming to India, I had learnt that there were men who spoke of the events of 1857 as the "first war of Indian independence"; and some of these men were Englishmen. And there was that in the remembrance of the shells that fell about the residency and the blood-soaked street that still filled the air of Lucknow with bitterness. I was remembering the words of an Indian, who had said to me: "I believe that the interests of those two great nations, England and India, were destined to be linked together for common good and mutual esteem for centuries to come. And so they would have been, had it not been for the bitterness that breeds still more bitterness on both sides."

"What was the beginning of that bitterness?"

"I believe that the beginning of it was the Mutiny. And but for that——"

I thought of the storm in a teapot that had ended in the birth of a new nation across the Atlantic, and I thought of the greasy cartridges that had fired the first shots of the Mutiny, and the words "but for that" were a cold sword between me and all sense of triumph in the Residency memorials.

Lucknow, however, was gracious and full of lovely gardens, and the river wound beautifully, and there were tall trees, and monkeys on the bridges. In the Martinière College I saw, in marble, the thin, exquisite features of its founder,

and I remembered that France had once lent grace and subtlety to the Western world. I found a ruined Georgian palace, with flower-beds kneeling round it in mute admiration, and I knew then that at least one King of Oudh had had his imagination stirred by tales of Brighton and St. James's.

But there was still something in the air of Lucknow that put one on the defensive.

"And so you really like India?"

"Yes," I replied. "I love India."

"But how can you bear the dirt, the spitting, and the smells?"

"I try to see and smell beyond it, even as I do in a tram when I go back to Scotland. The slum people of Scotland smell, and I don't like it, but I say to myself that, if I had no facilities for washing and changing my clothes, I should be no different."

"You can't compare the smell of Scotch slum people with Indians."

"No, that is true. The Scotch smell is infinitely worse. But they are not to blame. The very poor of a cold country are much dirtier than the poor of a hot."

They looked at me with grave disgust. "I see; and so you like the Indians themselves?"

"I find them charming."

"Oh! They certainly have a superficial charm, if you don't look below the surface."

I was silent. These people lived in India; I was a chance visitor. To put my opinion against theirs would have been, not only ill-mannered, but also very foolish.

"Surely," they demanded, "you aren't of those who think all peoples are equal?"

I smiled, remembering that the Dewan had asked me the same question at Mandū.

"No," I answered. "I believe, not in equality, but in aristocracy. I believe in a fourfold aristocracy. I believe in the aristocracy of blood, and the aristocracy of intellect;

the aristocracy of character, and the aristocracy of the spirit. The first two are God-given, the last two may be acquired by any beggar in the road."

"I must admit," one said, "these people have breeding. I've sat and interviewed an old Rani, who was totally illiterate and narrow-minded, who knew nothing of what went on beyond her narrow purdah walls. And she probably wasn't even very clean ; and yet she had something quite indefinable that made me feel crude and new and common, and I thought : 'That woman is every inch a princess.' We'll grant you the blood, then, and we'll grant you the intellect. Those two are God-given, as you say. Now, what about the other two that man acquires for himself?"

I remembered my holy man at the Nil Kanth Palace, and the conversations I had had with those who sought the Truth, for, to them, the Truth was God. And they had told me that India's reverence had always been reserved, not for the emperor or the warrior, but for the Sadhu.

"I have seen the aristocracy of the Spirit here in India as clearly as I ever saw it in the West." Then my thoughts went from my holy man to the evening on the terrace outside the unknown nobleman's tomb, and how I had come to the Sorrowless Land, and how it was India that had brought me there.

"Well," a dry voice interposed, breaking in on my reverie, "you haven't said anything about the fourth and most important aspect."

"Those who have breeding, and those who have attained to the heights of the Spirit, bear their mark in their faces, each in a different way. It is there plainly for those who have eyes to read. The man who has a fine intellect betrays himself in conversation. But with the man of character it is more difficult ; you can't sum him up in half an hour ; you must live beside him, and find out his true worth slowly. After all, the average man is one whom you meet casually in society. It is with his mental make-up that you have to do, not his character, and, very often, he is such a thundering

bore that you are not tempted to look below the surface. I think the average Indian is more intelligent than the average Englishman."

"We are not talking of intelligence ; we are discussing character."

"There was once a Greek Ambassador to the Court of Chandra Gupta, between the years 306 and 298 B.C. His name was Megasthenes, and his description of India was about the only authentic one that reached Europe for nearly two thousand years. He wrote that he was amazed at what he saw. In those days there was no sign of slavery in India ; the women were gentle and chaste, and the men were courageous beyond compare. Above all, no Indian was known to tell a lie. I don't think you can ask much higher of a country than that its women should be gentle and good, its men brave and true."

"But you are diving back into the pre-Christian era."

"But, surely, in the East you must take long views? India was not made in a day—nor was she marred in a day."

After a moment's silence, I added : "I don't see how it is possible for anyone to stay in this country who is not prepared to try and love it."

"But you don't understand. We do love India. We'd far rather live here than anywhere else."

"Yes, I understand that," I replied. Then I was silent, for I was a visitor to the country, and visitors must be polite. But I was thinking that it is one thing to love club-houses, and golf-courses, and the cinema, and quite another to love India or the Indians.

In the silence that followed could be heard the shouts of some students near the Monkey Bridge, who were throwing streams of coloured paint over each other.

PART IV
EARTH AND SKY

CHAPTER I

THE KHAJURI PLAIN

“WELL,” my cousin greeted me coldly, “and so the Hindus have taught you to say Rām Rām instead of Allah?”

I smiled evasively and turned round to watch the luggage being hoisted on to the tongas. I wanted to say that if a man could reasonably believe in the Word Made Flesh, why could he not also accept the Great Affirmation, the Everlasting Yea, Brahma’s creative word “Aum,” the “I am” of Hinduism. But somehow the cool, crisp night air of Peshawar station did not lend itself to philosophy, and I replied vaguely that there was no real difference between Rām Rām and Allah. As I stepped into the car, I thought : “I’ll ask the Khan what he feels about it.”

When, however, I began : “You see, Khan Sahib, it seems that the British can’t or won’t try to understand Hinduism—that is to say, unless they are freaks or bogeys. Now, frankly, do you think I’m either a freak or a bogey?”

“How can I say, when I do not know what a freak or a bogey is like?”

I laughed. There was something refreshing in the uncompromising attitude of the Khan. After weeks of that spoiling which tends to engender a belief in one’s own importance, it was most salutary to return to the Tand where no minor prophet has any honour.

“Well, granted that I am a bogey, don’t you think that it is monstrous that one of the three great religions on which the world stands should be misrepresented, whether wilfully

or ignorantly? The British believe that the Hindus are practically heathen, and my bearer believes that every Hindu will roast for ever in eternal flame. Now what is your opinion?"

The Khan looked down into the clear green depths of the reservoir beyond Bara Fort that supplied the city with drinking-water.

"I believe that all virtuous men will go to heaven. But the Hindus have untouchables, and that is not right. We Muslims believe that all men are equal in the sight of Almighty God."

The Khan's attitude was the same as my cousin's. If there was nothing new under the sun, there seemed to be almost nothing different. I sighed. "All right; go ahead and tell me how many gallons of water Peshawar City consumes *per diem*. I'm listening now."

Summer had come to the Frontier. There were flowers everywhere, and occasional thunder-showers had laid the dust and washed the compounds. After the States, the grass seemed strangely green and abundant. With the coming of warmth a breath of unrest was stirring through the mountain passes, and there was trouble brewing among the tribesmen.

"In this case," I said to the Khan, "it is man, not God, who has disposed."

The *dhursi* round the corner had my measurements, and a grey tweed Norfolk jacket had been promised under two days' notice. Kirpah Ram was to supply me with a couple of shirts and collars, a tie, and a boy's pullover. From the city, baggy white Pathan trousers, a duck's-egg blue puggari, and silver basket could be procured in a few hours. My disguise was almost complete, for a visit to the Indian barber would effectively give me the desired Eton crop in ten minutes. There remained my complexion.

It was not a land where the magazines reported that all handsome men were slightly sunburnt, at the same time

supplying the necessary information whereby such a consummation might be obtained. Had I been blessed with a Latin skin, all would have been well, and I could have passed as a fair-complexioned Pathan. But it was the colour in my cheeks, pink, healthy, and Nordic, that stood between me and the sentries at the barrier. Once beyond the Frontier, I had but to sit silent, and the rest was in the hands of the Khan. But, unless something were done about my face, that iron bar would remain closed against me.

I filled the bath with permanganate of potash and water, and for ten minutes I sat with a submerged foot. When I withdrew it, my foot was dyed a faint, pale lemon-yellow. At the end of an hour or two the stain had vanished. What was required was a dye that would remain on the skin for four days. Walnut-juice was the solution. I had been told that walnut-stain remained. I imagined the return voyage with face, ears, neck, and arms painted a uniform pale beige ; and the fond greetings of my relations at Victoria Station. But that my complexion was well ruined for Kabul I never doubted.

When defeat came, I accepted it, I hope, philosophically. I was not living in a free country. My enterprise was neither criminal nor disreputable, and had I been in England I should have pressed my case ruthlessly. It was merely a matter of moulding the law to fit my ends. The law decreed that no Englishwoman might go to Kabul ; I was therefore merely ceasing for four days to be an Englishwoman. No one could object to the Khan going to Kabul, remaining there for a day, and taking two of his sons with him, one of them a mere schoolboy. The fact that I was impersonating the elder was entirely between me and the Khan. No one in Peshawar City doubted that I should not be safer in the Khan's touring-car than if I were going in a tank* with a military escort.

The question of safety did not arise. No one, however, was willing to lay more than even money on whether I should not be discovered. The story was almost bound to

leak out. It would be another "They are saying"; and the saying would spread over the whole Frontier. I was leaving the country, in any case, in a fortnight. The worst that could happen to me was banishment for life. The curator of the museum had already told me that I was not destined to return to India. I therefore had nothing to lose. It was the Khan who would suffer. The only course, then, was to lay the matter before Supreme Authority; for, if permission came from that source, the whole sub-continent might say what it liked. It was the hundredth chance, and it failed.

I do not blame Authority. The men who dream secretly that they are explorers or those who sail the seas in pirate ships are not given the ultimate responsibilities. The man who sits in Government House may be lonely, but he does not sympathise with one who rides a dark horse alone up a stony side-road, when the broad fairway is clear for all to follow.

When the Khan suggested that Razmak might be offered as a sop to my broken spirit, Authority replied with a steely negative.

And so the Khan and I were driving across the Khajuri Plain, when, to comfort me, he remarked that of course this was likewise forbidden ground. I looked dully out of the car at the bare, forlorn waste of plain to the distant Frontier hills, and I thought that if all stolen sweets were as dry as this, one might well stay at home. Then I rebuked myself for ingratitude, and I swallowed my disappointment and began to talk about the comparative freedom of women in the North and those in the Centre.

"Our women do not want freedom," he said.

"That is because they have never known it."

"If they are wise, they know what it leads to."

"But all freedom doesn't lead to licence."

"Not all freedom—no. I have known English ladies who believed, as our women do, that they must suffer and share every plight with their husbands. They saved their husbands

from all vices, and were born to help and serve them. But I have known many others who set a bad example in the way of fidelity ; wives who went always with other men."

"There is much silliness and vulgarity nowadays. But you mustn't always judge by appearances. There are still a great many good wives left in Europe."

"Then the fashion at night—it is terrible. They bare their arms, and they bare their backs. No Pathan would allow his wife——"

"But, Khan Sahib, it is only a fashion. No one thinks anything of it. If one civilisation differs from another in its customs, at once it is called shocking. What is permitted in London is thought terrible at Peshawar, and what Peshawar accepts as a commonplace of everyday life is perhaps a criminal offence in London."

But the Khan was not listening. "Then this drinking," he said.

"I am free as air, but I do not smoke or drink."

"You do not, but others do. I will tell you. An acquaintance of mine in another province, a very rich man and important, had many friends among the British, whom he loved as his own. One day he wished to give a party, to show his respect and his affection. He consulted some of the leading British officials, and they said, very well, they would be happy to come, and he should give a party Muslim style. But he said no, it must be a party entirely English fashion, and, though he was Mohammedan, there must be champagne and all that. Well, the British accepted the invitation, and their wives were to accompany them. Now my friend said he loved the British and he wanted to do honour to his guests' wives, and so the ladies of his household must be present also. But his sons said no, they would not permit their wives to attend the party. They said : ' You are no longer young. We are of another generation and we go about more than you. Our women shall not break purdah.'

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"The night of the party came, and no expense was spared. There was much champagne and liqueurs, and the party went on for a long time. Miss Farmer, how shall I tell you? When the guests took their wives home, it was easier to count the sober ones than the others. The next day the sons went to their father, and they said: 'Now you will understand why we would not allow our wives to be present last night.'"

"Khan Sahib, it has not always been like that with us. But the world was broken round us when we were very young. There is security nowhere, and many of us are afraid of the future, and that to-morrow we shall die, and, though we aren't really the least merry, to-day we eat and drink."

There was silence as the car drove over the empty plain towards the brown passes of the mountains. At length, when the car had turned back towards Peshawar, I said: "Khan Sahib, if you came to England, you would meet British men and women who were truly typical of our nation. You would meet them, and I think you would like them. It is not easy to live far from the responsibilities of home, in another climate. Do not blame too hardly the women you see here."

After a moment, the Khan said: "They say 'East is East and West is West, and never the twain shall meet.' But they do not finish the verse."

"'Till Earth and Sky stand presently at God's great Judgment Seat.'"

"You should go on—what is it? 'There is neither East nor West, Border, nor Breed, nor Birth, When two strong men stand face to face, tho' they come from the ends of the earth.'"

"But I am not a strong man, Khan Sahib."

His eyes twinkled. "I never said you were, Miss Farmer."

I said slowly: "I think friendship transcends the barriers of age, race, creed, and sex, and I think, in spite of all the

hard sayings that are hurled at my generation, that is something we do know.”

As I spoke, the car turned in through the gates, and we were again within the barbed-wire enclosures.

CHAPTER II

CHAR BAGH

OUTSIDE THE MESS, in the clear air of Landi Kotal, the band was playing "Zakhmi Dil," the Pathan love-song.

"Who is for a last look at the barrier? But you must be away from here, starting down the pass, by four o'clock."

I was moving, with the others, towards the line of cars, when a hand touched my arm. "You don't want to go back to Michni Kandao. How many times have you been there? Four? Come with me. I'll show you something better."

When the cars were out of sight, we clambered into a regimental lorry, beside two armed orderlies. My companion held his gun on his knee.

Beyond the caravanserai, the lorry left the main road and turned down a hairpin bend to the left. The road was a mere stony track cut out of the mountain. As it dropped under the level of a stone bridge, the road to Kabul was above our heads. We rattled over two dried-up nullahs, down precipices, and round corners. Once I was thrown on to the floor of the lorry.

"Sorry to go like this. But time is short, and, if we want to reach Bagh, we must hurry."

The track ran parallel with the main road 200 feet above; then it turned again to the left, and we were on a level with the barrier.

"Change seats with me, please. If the others have got to the top of the post, they'll see your white hat from there."

I flung myself across the lurching lorry. The road began

to rise again. We were climbing now, turning always and twisting. Even as the road to Kabul fell into a valley beyond the barrier, so the track rose up the hillside on the left of the valley to Bagh at its summit.

We were crossing the hill where the third Afghan War was fought over, and, if we had had time to stop and look, we should have found human skulls hidden under the stones ; for there is never time to pause on those bare hills, not even time to bury the dead.

The lorry rattled under the archway that had " Char Bagh Fort " engraved over the entrance. In the yard, the men who presented arms gazed at me as if I were an apparition.

We climbed to the top of the fort, and turned our backs to the post and British India. The valley lay at our feet, and all round us towered the mountains, range upon range, violet and blue in the afternoon light. Against the clear sky, the highest range was snow-covered ; it was the Hindu Kush.

The air was cool, like a breath from the snows, but the sun burned furiously, and back at Landi Kotal, on my cousin's bed, lay sun-umbrella and glare-glasses. But, at such a moment as this, one does not think of sunstroke.

The immensity of the silent, empty mountain country was round us. It might have been a world newly created before man began his fussy ant-hill peregrinations. But in the valley ran my road to Kabul. Long I looked at my road, and I wondered if it were a last look, or whether the coming years would send me back up the Khyber Pass, through the barrier, over that white, still ribbon, into the forbidden land beyond. For, unlike the curator of the museum, to me the future was a blank wall before my mind. I tried not to think that one man had stood between me and achievement, for, in this astonishing world, if you go to seek for rubies, you are given diamonds instead. I had gone to find Kabul, and I had been given Mandū, and who shall not say that it was the better portion ?

The Indian officer in charge of the fort came up, smiling ; we had been seen from the top of the post, and the colonel had telephoned that we were to return immediately.

I looked my last at the tremendous, stern, impersonal world of mountain, and of dim shadow and high light, of snow and glittering sunshine, and of a silence as profound as death. I thought : " Let me always remember this. When the pressure and force of the West, the smell of petrol and the roar of traffic, are shattering my nerves, let me have this as a remedy against fear."

That evening, as the cool shadows were long on the Mall grass, Desmond said : " I think you ought to walk off your lunch, if you are going to be able to face any dinner."

As we turned down past the club to join the North Circular Road, he began : " Well, and so the final has been reached, and you are going Home—I hope satisfied ? "

" One is never wholly satisfied, but I have learnt that Kabul wasn't necessary, really. I mean, I had already received more than enough. India gave me all she could. The rest, what I make of it, is my business. The Kingdom of God, you know, is entirely within yourself."

" So much for the personal, then. What India has given you is your private affair, and it's not for me to pry into that. But the other side, please. What have you given to India ? I don't mean the enthusiasm, the meeting half way, and the—ah ! I shall call it open mind—but, frankly, I think all women have a tendency to a gentle bias, that subtle twist that is in the nature of the beast, and makes it so beautifully simple for them to mould their facts. I don't mean all that, for that has been obvious to all of us. When you have said that you loved India, you meant it, and you meant it without patronage. But you are clear-sighted enough to criticise the object of your love, and you owe it to India. What are your conclusions ? "

" I hoped you would spare me this. Besides, I have been as one who has travelled across the sub-continent in an aeroplane. I have seen it all as laid out like a map, and of

what value can my conclusions be compared to those of them who dwell among the green fields and crowded cities that I have idly skimmed over ? ”

“ I believe that the white heat of first impressions is always interesting, and occasionally illuminating. In any case, I am waiting for you to sum up.”

“ I do not look,” I began slowly, “ upon people or races as part of a political scheme. To me all humanity, taken either as individuals or as a whole, is profoundly interesting. But I am only interested in the government of a people as it affects them in their human relations to each other, or to the rest of the world. A palm-tree seen against a sunset sky is infinitely more important to me than an Act of Parliament.”

“ You have always made that abundantly clear.”

“ I am one,” I continued, “ who loves his own nation, without either hating or despising any other. I deplore intense nationalism as making for stupidity and militarism. I do not think that Britain is superior in every way to every other country in the world, from its climate and its food to the mental capacity of its average citizen. This fault, though congenital, is in no way to be attributed to my parents. I am telling you this, for, though personal, my feeble feminine mind can only reach the impersonal through the personal. Now you know how my brain functions.

“ I came to India believing what I had been told from childhood : that *natives*—it seems that retired ‘ Anglo-Indians,’ as we call them at home, don’t even know that that peculiarly offensive term is no longer current among the British in the sub-continent—that *natives* were a race of dirty, supine, diseased, immoral, heathen, inefficient, irresponsible blacks. Native, by the way, means, I believe, Hindu, and does not include either the aboriginal Bhils, Dravidians, etc. ; or the Muslims. In other words, the *natives* were an entirely inferior race. The fact that the Hindus have one of the finest philosophies in the world, and a culture and literature worthy to take their place with

those of the West, and that we of the West boast that we belong to the Aryan race, does not enter into their calculations. I am not blaming the mental attitude of Britain. It is a logical one. Those in authority had to make out to their own people that a subject race at the other side of the world was incapable of ruling itself ; otherwise the British, who have a love of liberty and justice in the pulses of their blood, would have revolted at the thought of keeping India in subjection."

"Then," asked Desmond, "you believe that the charge of corruption, irresponsibility, etc., is unfounded?"

"No, I do not ; and that is the tragedy. But I believe that if you tell a child every day from birth : ' You are a liar, a thief, a dirty little beast, and you are of less account than an earwig,' that child will grow into a man who is a liar and a dirty beast. A sense of moral inferiority has been implanted in the Indian. Just because the British have been brought up to believe that their complexions have conferred on them an inborn superiority, they have exuded a real belief that they were dealing with beings incapable of truth or honesty. The average Englishman mistrusts intelligence. If he has the misfortune to have any, he is at pains to conceal it. For that reason he has never tried to impress the Indian with the fact that he is stupid, because, if he had been stupid, the average Englishman would have had a greater respect for him. In consequence, the brains of India never having been questioned, it seems to-day to be frankly admitted by those who have lived most of their lives in India that the average Indian is cleverer than the average Englishman. By that, of course, they do not mean anything complimentary.

"In India I have found gentleness and charm, spirituality and culture, among the Indians I have been privileged to meet. But the whole sub-continent is suffering from a burning sense of inferiority. ' Inferiority complex ' is the most misused term in the English language. But it is not misused in connection with India.

"You see, Desmond, I can't bring myself to believe in the fundamental superiority merely of a so-called white skin. If I could, I suppose I should view the whole situation from another angle altogether. But I can't. What I have read has taught me that once the Hindus, before they were a subject people either to the Mohammedans or to the Christians, possessed those virtues of truth, and integrity, and courage, which are the only qualities upon which the white-skin builds up his arrogance complex. I am therefore forced to the conclusion that it is subjection that has lost the average Hindu his sense of honour, and not the fact that the sun, having darkened his skin, has done likewise to his conscience at the same time."

"But the Hindus have been conquered over and over again, until it looks as if they were intended to be the eternal butt of the invader."

"Then, if that is the case, the sooner we all come into the open the better. Let us have done with this talk of conquering India for the good of the Indians. Let us say bravely : ' Britain conquered India by the sword, and by the sword she shall hold her. India is the brightest jewel in the Imperial Crown, because more capital has been sunk, more British are employed in commerce, civil service, army, shipping, etc., than in any other possession : we hold India, not for the good of the Indians, but as an outlet of manpower, capital, and British goods.' "

"But you know that the attitude would only be tolerated by a small minority of die-hards."

"I know the British have a genius for compromise—the attitude of having the cake and at the same time eating it. Unfortunately, it doesn't always impress the rest of the world."

"But what about those men whose lives have been given in true service to this country ? "

"I know, and their name is legion. They are men who have quietly endured danger and sometimes death, who have never faltered in their martyrdom to duty, knowing that they

will never get any recognition, yet doing their particular job to the very utmost of their ability, because it was their job. These men, the straps of whose topis I am unworthy to touch, have gone home to die in Earl's Court or Cheltenham, with ruined livers and malaria-riddled systems. I wouldn't presume to speak of these men, so deeply do I honour them, were it not for the principle that underlies the quality of their work. These men believe that India is a sacred heritage handed on to them from their forefathers, only to be relinquished at the point of the bayonet. These men will tell you they have loved 'the right sort of Indian.' It is true, but they have loved them with the love that a man accords to a child or a dog. Because these men believe in the fundamental superiority of the white-skin.

"The civilisation of India is a very old one. It was at its height in the far-away days when the white-skins of Europe were gnawing bones in caves. Every race has its day. Who shall say when the day of the white man may not end, nor whether the black or the yellow man will not succeed him?

"That being so, I cannot bring myself to subscribe to the profoundly cynical belief that the white man is the final answer to the riddle of man's existence on this planet. I do not believe that God has any chosen people, any more than I believe that the Christianity of the Churches points the only way to man's salvation.

"It was in India, among the Hindus, that I found what I had always fumbled after in the modern semi-pagan materialism of the West, that oneness with the Universal Spirit. And having found it, I must try and keep it even when I get sunk back into European cynicism. For it was the Hindus who taught me the meaning of Christ's most profoundly important words: 'I and My Father are one'—words which the Churches for nearly two thousand years have tried to ignore or misrepresent."

"My dear, you seem to feel this very deeply."

"Yes, I feel it deeply, and for that reason I must say

all these things to you. It's the least I can do for a people to whom I owe so much."

"Then I take it that you believe that the British, like the Roman occupation of England, will hold India for a certain period, and then they will get out, and they will leave behind them some water-systems and some good roads, and nothing more?"

"I believe that India is the foundation-stone of the Empire, and, if that stone is removed, I believe that the Empire will crash. I believe that Britain in her dealings with other European nations is a factor for balance and justice and peace. Therefore I say that, if Britain loses her Empire and is reduced to a third-rate Power, God help our civilisation. Therefore I am filled with the most profoundly gloomy thoughts."

We had reached the bridge that led towards the city. In the distance I saw the minarets of the *masjid*. The road beside us was filled with the clamour of tongas and bullocks. I raised my eyes to the far-away Frontier hills that were dark with the coming night.

Desmond touched my arm. "If this is good-bye, don't let it be a tragic one. You mustn't end on a note like that."

I laughed, and then in silence we walked towards the Sada Bazaar.

"Come," he said at last, "you used to be good at pretending. Can't you pretend now?"

"All right. I'll pretend that the world is not ruled by political madmen, but sane men and strong men. I'll pretend that these wise men in Britain realise that the world can only prosper on the terms of give as well as take. These men will realise that the only hope of saving our civilisation is in the West giving to the East, and the East giving to the West. Britain shall give to India a system of public hygiene, teach her reticence, and help to root out the sense of inferiority that breeds boastfulness, corruption, and inefficiency. To Europe, India will give gentleness and grace and the metaphysics which, when translated into the

language of ethics, will provide for the urgent need of a world that has lost the support of a fatherly, personal God, and does not yet know it is searching for the Absolute within itself.

“ Then these wise men will say to India that the ultimate goal of both Britain and India must be a free, self-governing India, and that the road to that goal must be by way of the trust that makes people trustworthy, the responsibility that breeds responsible men. And these men must let India say to herself : ‘ Within the Empire if possible, and without it if necessary.’ They will tell the young men at home that it is a privilege to set foot in India, and only those of the highest quality, both of brains and character, will be allowed to serve there ; young men whose fitness has been tested at home ; who, before they step on to Ballard Pier, have learnt at least three of the languages spoken by the people of India and have taken the trouble to study something of the history and literature of the country. Then the British regiments serving in India will be combed, and all the junior officers suffering from the combined malady of arrogance, imbecility, and alcoholism will immediately be cashiered and sent home. All men holding posts, either civil, military, or commercial, will be expected to mix with Indians of a similar education and breeding, on the same footing as Britons residing in Italy or France would endeavour to meet socially the *natives* of those lands.

“ As to the women—those strong men of Westminster will banish eight out of every ten white women living in the sub-continent. Of the twenty per cent of exceptional women left they will say to the single ones : ‘ Can you show that your presence is adding anything to India ? ’ To the married they will say : ‘ Are you childless ? Or are you willing to be parted from your children during the greater part of their childhood, and do you intend to remain by your husband’s side, aiding him in his work to the best of your ability, by fidelity, by good example, and by your interest in Indian women and their welfare ? ’

"India is no longer the best marriage market for the anxious mother of six plain daughters. Men are scarce in England, and poor. India has become the longest bar in the world for those young women who are out to boast of the greatest number of cocktails from the greatest number of subalterns per week. Therefore the young woman who goes to India for the proverbial good time shall be debarred from going at all.

"I travelled out with a boat-load of brides. The ones who were pointed out to me as the 'ideal type for India' had brawny muscles, were unconquerable at deck-tennis, and could say 'Whoopee' and 'At-a-boy' more times in the hour than the rest of the ship. I should have thought that the tennis and the muscles made them ideal for Wimbledon. Mental deficiency as a prevailing disease is not contagious so far as the Indians are concerned. Only I should have thought that the man who could bring himself to marry a woman who said 'At-a-boy' wasn't going to benefit India by his presence.

"I am not going to say anything about manure-heaps. There are plenty in the West, and it's not my business to discuss the extent of India's. That's her own affair, and she only can clean it up. But when anybody says to you that India is spoilt, what they really mean is that the peasant who passes you on the road dares to-day to look you between the eyes, whereas once he grovelled at your feet."

As I spoke I walked across the compound into my own verandah. I sank exhausted on to the sofa.

"Farman Shah, bring me a glass of water, please. I've never delivered a lecture before."

The lights were lit in the bungalows, and the trees had merged into the darkness along the side of the Mall. A boy passed on a bicycle, singing to himself in a high, sweet voice.

I smiled at Desmond over the top of my glass. "I'm not asking you whether I've convinced you, only, woman-like, I want the last word. You can't refuse me, because in two days I shall be in the train.

“ I’ve talked a lot to-night—a lot of nonsense, you will say. But this I mean from the bottom of my heart : I do believe that India is capable of re-birth. But the re-birth must come from within, and no foreign Power can help her to it. It rests within herself whether she comes to what Lord Irwin hoped for her when, in his parting words, he said :

*“ In word, wisdom ;
In thought, faith ;
In action, courage ;
In life, service :
So may India be great.”*

THE END

